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Volume X Number 2

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Around the Corner

JUST as Nature hates a vacuum, Man loves a mystery. In an effort to solve the mystery of Creation he has given birth to Mythology, and in an attempt to solve the mysteries of Mythology, he has achieved Philosophy.

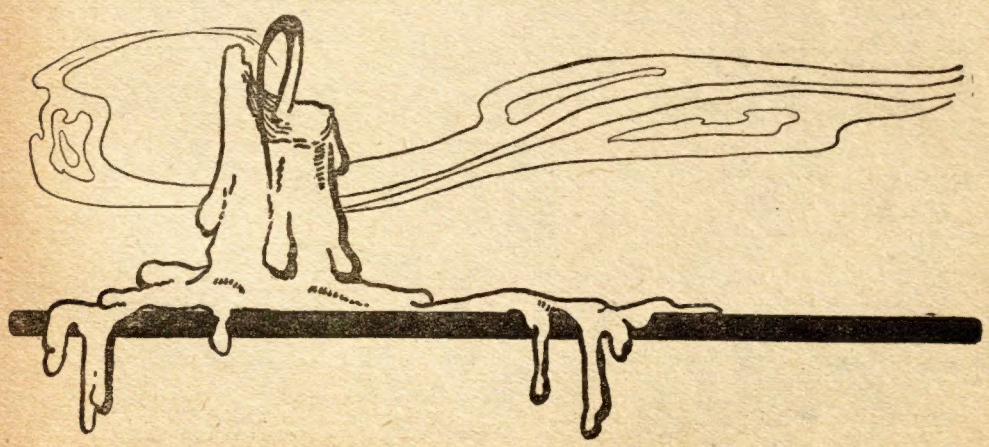
But the great mystery of Life itself is still around the corner.

And this is as it should be. For the inquisitive mind is the progressive mind, and Nature knew what she was about when she gave Man an endless mystery to solve.

And speaking of endless mysteries—this magazine is full of them. Not simply the kind of mysteries that are solved at murder trials or by detectives with revolvers and dark lanterns, but also the mysteries that lead into every known corner of the earth and of the mind, and which tread with rather fearful, timid steps into the farther, uncharted realms of the soul.

In short, MYSTERY MAGAZINE is turning all kinds of corners, each and every month; startling and unexpected corners that are likely to reveal, with equal simplicity and directness, a bandit or a Buddha or a bun.

And buns are just as interesting as bandits if they are written up properly.



Jewels

By ELIZABETH HERRICK

Author of
"Witness," "The Crimson Robe," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

In JEWELS you will find not only mystery but also that priceless thing which readers expect in stories by Elizabeth Herrick—a knowledge of human nature. In this tale of the jeweler and his family her characters live, suffer and triumph just as you and your neighbors do. This is the mark of a great story.

WILKINS snapped the case open before putting it in his brown-leather bag to take home—he always carried home to the better security of the concealed safe in his library wall the more valuable of his own gems and of those entrusted to him—and looked long at the stone. As he looked the face of the jeweler, hard and keen and perfectly cut, softened and flushed and a light played over it like the thousand reflections from the glittering facets of the great gem.

It was a wonderful stone, remarkable alike for color, quality and carat; a river stone of snowy brilliance and the most perfect water. Holding it in the hollow of his palm, he knew that he held there a greater fortune than most men amass in a lifetime.

Yet, to the connoisseur, this was the least of its appeal—it lay rather in the crystalline clarity of its brilliance. There was no faintest stain of color in the absolute flawlessness of its glittering perfection.

WILKINS had loved jewels ever since he could remember. At three he had swallowed a pearl from a ring of his mother's; at thirteen, he had purloined from her jewel-casket a diamond brooch and hoarded it for weeks in a drawer of his chiffonier for pure lust of its sparkle.

He had remained unmoved while the house was upset by the family and representatives of the law in a vain hue and cry after burglars. The brooch was discovered two months later through the chance honesty of a chambermaid, but the report of its discovery to a still mystified chief of police was not a recommendation to Wilkin.

"That boy will rob a bank, if he lives to grow up!" had been the chief's prognostication.

But, in growing up, Wilkins disappointed expectations. He became a highly reputable man of business. His knowledge of stones, his unerring instinct as to values, with his repute as a goldsmith, made him known speedily and favorably throughout the trade and among connoisseurs. He had handled, probably, more valuable gems than any ten of his brother jewelers.

His reputation as an expert passed local boundaries. Stones were sent him from other cities, near and far. His tapering, appraising fingers and keen appreciative eyes seemed to know the worth or the flaw of a gem at sight and on touch.

If a diamond betrayed even a suspicion of false color in certain lights, if it held a "glass" or a carbon spot under its surface, his quick eye appeared to detect it before the loup showed it up. If the pavilion lacked so much as an infinitesimal fraction of its proper depth, the sensitive fingers found it wanting.

Clients liked to watch the slim, fine fingers pick up a stone, turn it, and let it slip between them like a thing of no value.

"Cape!" he would say. "Fish-eye!"

Or,

"A jager, yes, but shallow! Poor cutting!"

Or,

"Color's good, but quality's lacking. It's not a gem diamond!"

"By the time I retire," he once told a client, in a burst of unusual confidence, "I intend to own one of the best private collections of gems, unset and in the rough, in the country."

The client was a woman rich in everything but imagination. She could appreciate fine set stones for their beauty sake and as a social asset, but gems of great price unset—even uncut——!

"What in the world would be the good of them then?" she asked, wondering. And he had answered her dreamily, more like a poet than like Wilkins, the jeweler.

"Oh, to let them fall between my fingers like crystallized rain and catch the sun's sparkle!"

IN THE way of business he had handled nearly every stone of note in the city. Whenever one passed through his hands that was exceptional for color or carat, he made a point of adding its match, as near as its match could be found, to that private collection, which was the reason, no doubt, why, though his business seemed always increasing, the mortgage on the house he had bought in the first flush of success remained stationery.

But the gem now in his hand was impossible of duplication, even if he could find cash to purchase so valuable a stone. The next to it in local repute had once been his property and was now Mrs. Chilford's. But with the Cotter stone at last in his hand he knew that this "next" was a long way off.

Therein lay bitterness for Mrs. Chilford, which was a reason that she should persist in his mind that afternoon while he was studying the Cotter stone and making rough diagrams of the new setting that was more strikingly to display its remarkable size and perfection.

Wilkins could not forget that,

whereas Miss Cotter had left her marvelous stone with him almost as trustfully as a sixteen-year-old miss leaves her pearl beads for restringing, Mrs. Chilford had been, only yesterday, rather unpleasantly suggestive about the possibility of substitution for two briolette brilliants she had left to be reset in a lavalliere for her daughter.

He had been minded to refuse to handle the gems, remembering Bentley, but he had remembered, too, that Mrs. Chilford was, in her sphere, all-powerful. Moreover, his knowledge of the Bentley affair was, he reasoned, itself a protection. He had retained the briolettes and swallowed the insinuation.

But it was human to want her to know that he was handling the Cotter diamond and, also, by how many thousands it outvalued her own. Besides the Bentley matter, there were other queer stories about her in the trade—the necklace story for instance . . .

HE SNAPPED the case shut, with a last lingering look at the stone, and placed it in his bag along with a selection of his own diamonds, the pair of briolettes, and a fine Burmah ruby. A clerk asked him a question as he was closing the bag. He turned to answer without taking his hand from the fastening. He locked the bag and carried it out to his car, placing it on the seat, along with a tennis racquet as a birthday present for Rudolph, Jr.

Two or three people passed as he was getting up the power—one of them the haberdasher next-door, who nodded and spoke, but none of them stopped.

All these figures came back afterward with the vividness of a motion picture. There was no other living thing in sight—except a dog that ran out and snapped at his heels as he stepped into the car. One does not ordinarily suspect a dog of the theft of a jewel. Yet, when Wilkins opened the bag in his library, the Cotter diamond was gone.

IT IS true, though, that he had not opened the bag immediately on his arrival. Deliriously high voices pealing out through the hall announced Ruddy's party in full swing. To escape it until he had safeguarded the jewels, Wilkins entered by a side-door from the *porte-cochère*.

He had just placed the bag on the library-table and turned to open the safe, when his wife drifted in through the French window that gave on the piazza, a pleasant tremor of gratification in her manner. She arrested his arm.

"Rudolph! I want you to come and meet Mrs. Chilford—you've never met her socially, you know. It won't take you a minute. She is just going." Then, in a tone she discreetly dropped, but which was arrogant with pride, "She has been here since four!" she triumphed. "She brought little Reginald herself in her limousine."

Surprised by the coincidence, for this was the woman he had been thinking of, Wilkins closed the bag, snapping it shut without locking it—this, remember, was home!—and followed his wife.

It was only for a minute, but the minute passed into another and yet another, and the others sped swiftly into a half-hour. Wilkins sat close to the French window, the unlocked bag heavy on his mind at first, but his anxiety lifted when he began to speak of the great diamond—it was as if he were holding it safely, while he talked, in the hollow of his hand.

The talk veered rourd to gems, under Wilkins's guidance. The great lady, who had risen, sat down again. This was a compelling subject—both she and Mr. Chilford owned valuable

collections. Mr. Wilkins, she was sure, must have handled some notable stones. Mr. Wilkins had. As a matter of fact, he was handling one now —the Cotter diamond. Mrs. Chilford knew it, perhaps—at least by repute?

Mrs. Chilford winced on the instant —it was rumored that Miss Cotter had never received Mrs. Chilford—but countered immediately. Certainly, it was accounted a good match for her own diamond. What did Mr. Wilkins think?

Mr. Wilkins thought a good deal and said perhaps more than was wise. But, again, he had his reasons. Hers was a good stone, he said, in his tone of appraisal—a good stone and of good color, but there was no question of matching, for Mrs. Chilford's was a jager. Also, it was below the weight of the Cotter diamond by five-and-a-half carats. Also, that nick in the skin of the girdle would detract, in some eyes, from its value.

The rivers stone, on the contrary, was without appreciable flaw and of the purest water. There was, he judged, ten thousand dollars between the two values.

Mrs. Chilford's eyelids flickered and for one brief instant her white even teeth punished the red underlip. The next, lips and teeth shone brilliantly in a smile of rare dazzle.

"So much? Poor me! I've seen the stone, but I confess it didn't greatly impress me. Possibly, if I saw it again—you still have it?" she questioned.

Wilkins's wife turned to him eagerly.

"Haven't you it in your bag?"

TWO CHILDREN, coming out from the hall just then, absolved Wilkins from answering. And while the children were bidding their hostess good-by, Mrs. Chilford remembered that she must find Reginald. Wilkins offered to look up the boy but was not permitted. His valuation of her diamond seemed to rankle.

She re-entered, through the library, some three minutes later, her small son in tow. There was further delay while Wilkins, at his wife's instance, sought Ruddy. Wilkins found him in a corner of the hall, with Eleanor, a small neighbor. The children's mouths were full of candy and Ruddy had more in his hand. Wilkins reached for the sticky fist.

"Here, give me that, and use your hanky!" he ordered. "Your mother wants you to say good-by to Mrs. Chilford and Reggie."

Ruddy used his hanky obediently, but the small fist went up and crammed its contents into the overfull mouth. The disgusted Wilkins gave him a shake, whereupon the child burst into a roar.

In the commotion Mrs. Chilford took her leave. It was only a trivial incident, but on the trivial depends, oftentimes, the momentous. For the pacification of Ruddy and the departure of the other children kept Wilkins from the library another ten minutes. And when he could make his escape and go in, the Cotter diamond was gone.

His wife did not follow him for some minutes. She had to send the still lamenting Ruddy upstairs to his nurse and say good-by to Eleanor, the little neighbor. When at last she entered the library, she wore an air of just grievance.

"You always make the worst of Ruddy! Eleanor says he took the candy for her."

Wilkins was bending over the table, his hands gripping its edge, the brown bag open before him. He answered impatiently, without looking up.

"What do you think I care about *that?* It's gone!" And suddenly she saw that he was shaking and that his

face was dead white. The color went out of her own. She took a step toward him, her heart skipping a beat.

"Rudolph! What do you mean? *What* is gone—not—oh, Rudolph, not the Cotter diamond?"

He gave her a grim glance, his lips hard-set.

"The Cotter diamond!" he repeated between them. Great beads of sweat stood on his forehead. His trembling hands felt behind him for the support of the table, found it and clung.

HIS WIFE ran to his side and bent over the bag.

"You haven't looked!" she cried hysterically. "It's in the bottom of the bag, of course. It *must* be! You weren't out of the room ten minutes. Nobody could have taken it. Besides, nobody could have come into the room without your knowing. You sat right by that window"—she p o i n t e d dramatically—"all the time."

He answered her points with a curious mechanical precision, monotonous as the steady ticking of a clock.

"I was out of the room forty minutes. You sent me for Ruddy. The house was full of strangers. And there were two or three chauffeurs outside."

"The chauffeurs wouldn't have known about the bag. It must have been one of the caterers."

"Or one of the governesses!

"Or one of our own servants!

"Or one of the children!" he sneered.

They looked at each other blankly. Then a flash like the glare of a searchlight lit Wilkins's groping mind. He leaned suddenly toward his wife and spoke with low emphasis, driving the words into her face with an accusing forefinger.

"Or your new friend, Mrs. Chilford!"

Mrs. Wilkins's shriek of laughter was akin to hysteria. But Wilkins's voice went on and the accusing forefinger came closer.

"Mrs. Chilford! She went in after her boy. She went through the library."

DESPITE disbelief, his wife started. But the idea was absurd! Mrs. Chilford stealing jewels! Why, she could buy all she wanted.

"She couldn't buy this one," said Wilkins significantly. "There are ugly stories about her in the trade. They say she smuggled her necklace. And she brought a diamond to Bentley to be reset. He accepted the stone, I suppose, on her word and her social reputation. When he came to reset it, he found it was paste. When she called for the ring, she pretended to discover a substitution and charged him with theft of the genuine diamond. He had to choose between giving her a genuine diamond for her imitation or ruin.

"It was financial ruin for him, anyway. He gave her the diamond, but he failed a month or so later. That's the history of the jewel she was bragging about here. And you say she can buy all the jewels she wants. She can *buy* them all right, but she won't buy them if she can get them any other way!"

"But perhaps what's-his-name, the jeweler, *did* steal her stone? A jeweler *might* be a thief as well as another man."

She had meant nothing personal. Nevertheless Wilkins winced.

"Of course. But Bentley was honest in the matter. I know, for she brought the stone to me first. I saw it was paste and wouldn't handle it. But she caught Bentley, poor devil!"

"Why didn't you tell her you knew it was paste?"

"What! Throw suspicion on myself? Remember, she brought the stone to me first. I couldn't ruin myself to save Bentley. But that's why

I rubbed it into her about the Cotter diamond. I knew she couldn't steal that. I mean"—he corrected himself with a jarring laugh—"I *thought* I knew she couldn't steal it, but—she has!"

The jeweler's voice rose shrilly, like an hysterical woman's. His wife tried to calm him. It might be any of the others.

The obvious thing to do was to call the police. Of course *they* would find it. Police always did—in novels and newspapers.

BUT THE police, being called, neither found the stone nor solved the mystery of its disappearance.

The inspector's only theory appeared to be that every other one was preposterous. Nobody had suggested to him any of the children as thief. For that reason, doubtless, he wanted Ruddy brought down to be questioned. But he got little or nothing. Ruddy, under pressure, denied that any of the children had gone into the library after his father's arrival, and his further contribution to the general enlightenment was tears.

Apparently there lurked in his youthful mind a terrorizing suspicion that his elders wanted to tag the theft onto his own late disgraceful behavior as a further item for just retribution—he had been punished with bed!

"I wasn't a greedy boy!" he protested between sobs. "Daddy *said,* 'Swallow it twick!' "

"Oh, dry up on the candy!" said his father impatiently. "Mr. Flaherty asked you a question."

"Oh, let the kid go!" said the inspector good-naturedly. "He don't know anything. I didn't suppose that he did, but it's my way to be sure. Now, about the Chilford woman!" he wagged a wise head. "Nothing doing in that quarter, either. Of course, it *might* be. But it don't look reasonable. She's richer than Croesus's widow. What's to hinder her buying a diamond like the what-d'ye-call-it, the Cotter diamond, if she wanted it."

THE JEWELER'S smile was the smile of the connoisseur.

"She couldn't. It's a very rare stone. You see, Inspector, there are diamonds and gem diamonds. This is a gem diamond. Besides, that's not her way."

He told over the Bentley story. For the first time since entering the house the inspector looked interested. He sat up alertly.

"Where'd Bentley get the real diamond he gave her for the paste? Did he have it in stock?"

"No. That's where I came in. He bought it of me. That was the stone she was after. It was of a size with the paste. She knew that I had it. She'd been talking of buying it."

"Then if she wanted to work such a dodge why didn't she bring *you* the stone?" put in the inspector astutely.

"She did," Wilkins admitted. "She came to me first."

"Oh!" the inspector's voice seemed to pounce on the back of the words. "She came to you *first!* Left the stone with you, I suppose?"

"No. I told her I couldn't do the work. You see, I knew the stone wasn't genuine. And I remembered that queer story about her necklace——"

"Cut that out—nothing to do with the diamond! So you told her you couldn't reset her stone or whatever she wanted. How did you know it wasn't genuine?"

"How do we know any stone is genuine? I had it in my hands long enough to be sure."

"How long?"

"Oh, between five and ten minutes."

"Did she stay right there?"

"Yes. She was looking at lavallières."

"Oh! She was looking at lavallières while you looked at the diamond!" There was something disagreeably insinuating in the inspector's tone. Wilkins became restive.

"Certainly. I don't see what that's got to do, though, with the diamond I've lost."

The inspector smiled unpleasantly.

"You mean with the diamond the Cotter woman has lost. Well, it may have a lot to do with it, Mr. Wilkins. We don't ask questions just for conversation. Isn't it unusual in a city this size for a jeweler to carry such a fine gem in his stock? You say Bentley didn't have one."

"Yes. I bought it for myself—not to sell. But it was such a fine gem that I left it in stock a few weeks, for the advertisement."

"But you sold it to Bentley!"

"Yes—to help him out of his mess."

The inspector nodded, his hands on his knees, his eyes thoughtfully on his square, stubby fingers. Presently his eyes swept up in a keen flash of interrogation.

"You say you bought that stone for yourself—not to sell. What did you want of it—to give to your wife?

Wilkins answered with obvious reluctance.

"I bought it for my private collection."

The inspector's nod of satisfaction was distinctly aggressive. It said for him that he had thought as much. He rose at once, ponderously.

"Well, we'll let you know, Mr. Wilkins, as soon as we uncover something. But I'll tell you right now I don't suspect Mrs. Chilford. Possibly one of the chauffeurs or governesses —we'll look 'em all up. Don't suppose there's anything in that, either. But it's my way to be sure!"

The inspector's manner was exasperatingly inconsequential. He took the theft of the Cotter diamond as coolly as if it had been a piece of cut-glass. The jeweler flared.

"Maybe you don't suspect anybody. Maybe the finest stone in this part of the country disappeared of itself."

The inspector's eyes narrowed in a gimlet-like thrust of distrust. He brought his heavy-jowled face close to Wilkin's.

"Maybe we suspect the thief!" he bit significantly. "We'll let you know, never fear, so soon as we're sure."

When the inspector had gone, Wilkins burst out angrily:

"The fellow acts as if he suspected *me!*"

"You never told me you were making a collection!" his wife mused in answer, with apparent irrelevancy.

BUT WHATEVER the inspector's suspicions, he was a long time in developing them. Days slipped into weeks. The police department, interrogated by telephone, was at first reticent, then bluff.

"We're doing all we can," was the utmost the jeweler could get out of it.

Meanwhile Miss Cotter called for her diamond. Wilkins contrived to make a plausible explanation. The setting he had finished didn't satisfy him; he wanted to try the stone in another. Miss Cotter graciously assented, but added an ultimatum. She must have the stone by Saturday.

He left the shop early and went straight to police headquarters. He was kept waiting in an outer office a half-hour, during which he wandered about the room, getting up, sitting down, nervously turning the pages of magazines and newspapers without reading a word, able to think of nothing but himself.

The inspector's sharp glance of distrust bore again through his thin-skinned sensibility. But whereas before he had been able to work himself

up to anger over it, now he felt only fear. By a curious freak of memory, he saw, on the instant, his mother's brooch sparkling up at him out of his boy hand. He started and glanced furtively round him, as if somebody else could see what he himself saw. The room was empty, but sweat stood on his brow.

Admitted at last into the inspector's presence, his overstrained nerves committed him to the blunder of bluster. What on earth had the department been doing?

The inspector sat back. There was something portentous in the slow creak of his chair under his weight.

"Well," he said deliberately, "we've been looking up records, for one thing. We've looked up the record of everybody who was in your house the afternoon the diamond was stolen."

"You'll have to do something besides look up records," flared Wilkins.

The inspector's keen eyes drilled through him.

"Will we?" he said. "Now I'll tell you of one. There was a boy of thirteen—he went later in life into the jeweler's trade—who stole a diamond brooch from his mother and made fools of the police till an honest girl from old Ireland—name of Cassidy! —found it hidden away in the young gentleman's drawer. He had begun a collection, no doubt. Ever hear of that young feller, Mr. Wilkins? Well, our advice to that young man, who is now in the jeweler's trade, is that he look in that same drawer—say, his chiffonier drawer—for the Cotter diamond and"—the inspector's tone turned ugly; his huge fist banged down on the desk—"find it! That's all, sir. Good-day!"

Then, as Wilkins made no move to go, but stood, leaning heavily against the desk, his face a sickened white, the inspector lurched to his feet and went himself. At the door he looked around.

"And *find* it!" he repeated, with heavy significance.

WILKINS went home. Without knowing how he came there, he found himself at his door. He unlocked it mechanically and entered the hall. His wife called from the stairs, on a note of calamity:

"Oh, Rudolph!" then broke suddenly off. "What is the matter?"

He dropped into a chair.

"They've not found the diamond! They're not trying to find it!"

She drew a quick breath of relief.

"Oh, is that all?"

All! Wasn't it enough? He flared at her suddenly.

"I'm ruined! That damned child's party——"

She caught up his words.

"That damned child! Unsay it, Rudolph! Unsay it quick! The child's sick! I've had in the doctor."

He had got himself under control, but his lips twisted bitterly. So that was her idea of calamity—a child's little ailment! Though, of course, he was sorry.

"I didn't say 'damned child.' I said 'damned child's *party*.' It has ruined me, Nellie. Miss Cotter came for her diamond today. I had to lie to her. She gave me till Saturday. The police aren't doing anything. And I can't get it. My God, I can't get it!"

His wife went on with her subject, her voice strained and anxious.

"Dr. Trull thinks it's appendicitis. He wants to take him to the hospital."

For the moment Wilkins was startled. But he reassured himself instantly. Kids like Ruddy didn't have appendicitis. Stomachache, more likely!

"The one place they won't look for it is where the stone is. And the inspector talked today as if he thought *I* stole it."

"That's the way he talked here." His wife seemed indignant, not with the inspector, but with Wilkins for wasting words on an old grievance when Ruddy was sick. "He wants the operation tonight. He's coming at six to see you about it."

Wilkins's consternation sharpened to actual terror. With Ruddy in the hospital and the whole household upset, what chance would there be of finding the diamond?

"He mustn't operate—not, at any rate, till after Saturday!"

She turned on him furiously. "Mustn't operate"—when the child's life, perhaps, depended on haste.

"You care more about finding that diamond than saving your son!"

The strain Wilkins was under all at once snapped. He brought his darkly flushed face close to hers and glared into her eyes.

"And you care more about a kid's stomachache than your husband's good name. Do you know what it means if I don't have that diamond by Saturday? It means jail," he said crudely. "Yes, jail," he repeated, with a savage joy in her shrinking, "for your kid's father and ruin for you!"

THE COLOR that flooded her face under the first blow of his words had now drifted out of it. It looked startlingly white. She felt for a chair back and gripped it hard, her eyes holding to his with a curious fixed stare that turned slowly to terror. What if the inspector were right? What if her husband—Ruddy's father—had added the Cotter diamond to that secret collection?

"But you didn't take it!" she cried in an agony of appeal. "You didn't *take* it, Ruddy?"

Unconsciously, in her distress, she had called him by the old dear name she had used before his son came. The hot surge of blood left his face. And his words, when they came, drove the instant doubt from her mind. They had the ring of sincerity.

"No, Nellie, I didn't take it. Come, let's look at the boy!"

They went upstairs together. Ruddy was lying with his eyes partly closed, a deep flush on his face. He was not asleep, for now and then the curly lashes lifted a little to lower again heavily.

Wilkins sat down by the bed and lifted a hot little hand. The boy looked pretty sick: he was feverish, and there was a purplish tinge to his lips that Wilkins didn't quite like. Perhaps it would be best, after all, not to put off the operation. The doctor, coming in, emphatically corroborated, the more so that he didn't in the least like the boy's looks.

It was arranged that the hospital ambulance was to come for Ruddy at seven. His mother was to go with him. Wilkins took leave of the boy and followed the doctor downstairs. He put on his hat in the hall.

"Can I drop you somewhere, Mr. Wilkins?" the doctor asked as they went out together.

Wilkins accepted. He was going to Mrs. Chilford's. He added, in explanation, that a valuable diamond had recently been stolen from his house. The doctor opened his eyes.

"Oh, you think the thief sold it to Mrs. Chilford?"

"Something of the sort. I believe it is there." But between believing it was there and saying so to Mrs. Chilford lay a long way. Wilkins, waiting in the white and silver reception-room, was not ready with words.

"She'd like that kind of stone," he ruminated. "They all do—the thoroughbreds—choose it over blue goods nine times out of ten."

Any diamond expert will tell you the same. The public taste, educated in part by price, is for the blue stones, but the pure snow-white lustre of a

rivers gem appeals always to the connoisseur—to the man or woman whose ancestors have known jewels for generations.

ON THE heels of the thought Mrs. Chilford entered. She was dressed for dinner in a shimmering confection whose brilliance somehow imparted to the woman herself a hardness and glitter against which, as against the skin of a diamond, anything softer might wear itself through in vain. But to Wilkins's eyes her glitter was not convincing.

In spite of her beauty, her social valuation, she was "yellow goods." He had detected the false color that reduces carat and quality to naught—the damning tinge of the by-water. The jeweler, used to toss like stones contemptuously by, felt his social breeding slip from him.

"Mrs. Chilford, at my boy's party three weeks ago a diamond was taken from among other stones out of my bag on the library table. When I came to lock up the bag in my safe, I found the bag open and the case, which contained the stone, empty on the floor. The diamond was gone."

During his abrupt recital Mrs. Chilford's admirably arched eyebrows had been lifting as if asking the question:

"What is this to me?" Nevertheless,

"You astound me!" she murmured.

He answered her look rather than her words.

"It's this, Mrs. Chilford! The stolen stone is the one I had just been telling you about—the Cotter diamond.

"It's this, Mrs. Chilford! Just two persons besides myself knew of that diamond being in the house. One was my wife. The other, Mrs. Chilford, was yourself." He rose and stood over her, his face suddenly menacing, his voice pointing the words at her like an accusing finger. "And you—went —through — my library—*alone*—to to look up your boy!"

She, too, arose; all the color and warmth drifted out of her face, the face turned to ice, its hard white glitter startlingly like the missing diamond.

"I 'went through your library alone'—you mean that you think I—that *you* think *I*—why, this is intolerable! Mr. Wilkins, I will bid you goodnight!"

She swept from him toward the door, but did not pass it. She paused, ever so slightly, her face still away from him, but she seemed to Wilkins to be listening backward.

Wilkins followed up his advantage and her.

"I hope that you'll give it to me quietly," he said, almost in her ear, for the butler stood posed in the hall beyond. "I don't wish to cause you publicity. Of course, I understand. You merely wished to compare the Cotter stone with your own diamond —a very fine gem, also. But I must have the Cotter stone, Mrs. Chilford," —his jaws tightened and set squarely —"I must have it before Saturday."

Her face was set, too, hard and white and faultlessly cut. Her head held itself high and her eyes, deadly all at once in their glitter, looked him down.

In the clear white lustre of the woman there was discernible now no trace of "false" color. She was like nothing so much as the missing diamond—the great snow-white rivers. But while his eyes held, fascinated, to her dazzle, a contemptuous triumph came into her own. She swept up one jeweled hand to the portières and spoke into the hall with insolent hauteur.

"Parkins, please show this gentleman out!"

WILKINS came back to himself. His hat spun the length of the hall from

the splendid automaton that offered it. With a blank look the butler went after it. Wilkins stepped back deliberately into the reception-room.

A mirror on the opposite wall flashed back his face—the face of a stranger—eager, fierce, brutal almost, in its grim determination. Without a word the woman followed him and closed the door. His voice, harsh and short, compelled like a rude grip on her wrist.

"Look here! You'll give it to me—*now!* Do you hear? I know that you've got it. Go and get it! I meant to be considerate — to spare you because you're a woman, but I'm not considerate enough to be branded a thief in your place. I'm not Bentley. You see"—his significance menaced her like a weapon—"I know about that."

She was visibly touched, though she made a little disdainful gesture with both hands that struck fresh sparks from their blazing jewels.

"What do you mean? What do you think that you know?"

Wilkins laughed harshly.

"I know this: I know that the woman who juggled a gem diamond out of a poor jeweler for a paste brilliant wouldn't hesitate to take a finer gem from the bag of another poor jeweler if it was left in her way. And you went into the room alone," he reiterated with the damaging emphasis of a prosecuting attorney. "My wife is a witness that you went into the room alone."

She answered him nothing for a minute, but stood in a strange, frozen silence, her eyes chilling his blood with their fixed, stony stare. When at last she spoke, her voice caught him off guard. It was so swift, so unexpected. It tapered finely to a point, like a rapier. Wilkins recoiled from its thrust.

"What do you propose to do?"

"About the Cotter diamond?"

"No. About Bentley."

So that was her weak point. She had covered the last theft so skillfully she had no fear of detection. He could prove nothing against her beyond the fact that she went through the room. Her very wealth, her social standing, made his charge an absurdity on no stronger evidence that he had to adduce. But—he knew about Bentley! And the knowledge was his chance—a whip to hold over her.

"Tell Bentley—the police, too, if you won't give up the Cotter stone."

AGAIN she answered nothing for a moment, merely looked down on her hand, lifting it a little so that the light blazed full on the great diamond Wilkins had sold Bentley, set like a sun in the midst of lesser gems—a gesture of conscious innocence or incredible hardihood.

Wilkins's lips sneered: But when her eyes swept up again full into his face, once more the dazzling perfection of her clear lustre thrilled him.

She began speaking slowly, with a sort of regal dignity, distant and chill.

"Indeed! You would be very foolish then, Mr. Wilkins. I ought not to stay here one minute parrying charges with you. But I am willing to be charitable. I believe your loss is responsible for your discourtesy. For this reason I will tell you that, notwithstanding your very curious suspicions, the stone I left with Mr. Bentley was genuine—a very fine and very valuable gem."

It was wonderful acting—if it was acting. Once again her pure dazzle almost convinced; — yet in certain lights a by-water may fool even an expert! But Wilkins *knew* about Bentley. He forced a contemptuous laugh.

"Genuine! You forget, madam. I had it in my hands. It was a magnificent imitation so skilfully painted

under the culet to give it the jager color that, for a minute, it imposed upon me. Well, I've no more to say, except that I will give you until tomorrow; then, if the Cotter diamond isn't forthcoming, I tell the strange story of this"—he stepped closer and touched the great gem in her ring with his tapering forefinger—"to Bentley—and the police!"

THERE was no sign, now, of shrinking in the woman's manner. Either she was innocent or she had hardened herself to the emergency. She held herself haughtily erect, looking Wilkins down with cold eyes, in which was a dangerous glitter.

"You will do as you please—say what you think best to say, remembering that I myself saw in your stock a gem so like this"—she made the stone flash at him—"that I could easily have believed it my own. And as Mr. Bentley claimed that he bought this of you, and as you yourself have admitted that you had my stone in your hands, why"—she lightly shrugged her beautiful shoulders—"the conclusion is obvious. There was plenty of time for substitution the day I brought in my stone—I was a long time, I remember, looking at lavallieres!"

The blow was so sudden, so unexpected, the jeweler flinched. Again he saw, as in the inspector's office, that brooch of his mother's sparkling up from the palm of his hand. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

In different words from the inspector's she had charged the same thing. She had charged him with theft. He made a violent gesture of protest.

"Mrs. Chilford, you can't think that of me!"

She looked at him full, the light flaming from the facets of her great diamond in a blue brilliance not more glittering than her eyes.

"Is it any worse," she asked, with a slow smile of almost cruel triumph, "than what you think of me?" She opened the door into the hall. "Parkins, Mr. Wilkins is going!"

WILKINS went, but at the door of the room he wheeled and turned back. She was standing where he had left her, her light figure shining with a curious reflective brilliancy against the white-and-silver background like a diamond against platinum, her head thrown back, her lips parted over the dazzling teeth, mocking him, like her eyes, with a triumphant smile.

WILKINS went home through byways, choosing the most roundabout and poorly lighted. No criminal could have skulked more naturally in the shadow.

Arrived at his own door, he opened it almost surreptitiously and went in, glancing furtively around him. There was nobody in sight. He passed quickly through the hall into the library and switched on the light. With another glance around him he touched a secret spring in the paneled wall near the safe.

The panel slid back, disclosing a shelf from which Wilkins took down a square, black-covered box. He opened it, and a blaze of splendor sprang from the velvet lining. Green and red, white and rose and orange flashed and sparkled and, in the middle of the case, like a great central sun, catching and throwing back in a hundred rays of spectrum-hued light from its flawless facets all the brilliance and color of its glittering satellites, shone in matchless splendor a magnificent rivers diamond of great size and the purest water.

Wilkins' eyes burned on the stone with the passionate gaze of a lover. He reached out a tapering finger and touched it, turning it slightly. Its fire filled his eyes. His breath came

more quickly. He hesitated, anxiety and fear contending in his face with that burning longing of the lover.

If it should come to that—but, no, he could not part with it yet. It was the most perfect gem he had ever owned—his one cherished possession, more to him than his house, more to him than his business, as much, almost, as his honor.

He had schemed and contrived and scraped and saved these eighteen business years of his to buy it and he had bought it two months ago for a third of its real value from an owner who did not know stones. He could never replace it.

Slowly his fingers relaxed. The stone dropped back in its velvet nest. Then a new fear caught his breath.

What if they—the police—searched here? Would anyone believe this was not the missing diamond—anyone but an expert who had handled both stones? It was close—too close for those shrewd yet near-visioned eyes of the inspector! But Wilkins himself knew there were five carats between the stones. And he knew this stone of his was a shade less perfect.

But to make others know——. A step sounding in the hall, with incredible swiftness he snatched the gem and, stooping, pushed it under the edge of the carpet.

He stood snapping the box shut when his wife entered the room. He had not time to replace it. His manner was constrained and embarrassed. His voice fumbled with the truth the same as his fingers with the lock of the box.

He was looking to see if he had a diamond in his collection that was anywhere near a match for the Cotter stone, in case he had to replace it. Mrs. Chilford had *that*, but he couldn't prove it on her. Who'd take the word of a poor jeweler against Mrs. Van Dyke Chilford?

HIS WIFE listened indifferently. She was not thinking of the diamond, but of the boy. Ruddy was *her* jewel. And they had taken him to the hospital without her. At the last minute, it seemed, they wouldn't let her go. The doctor had said "Better not!"—because of the other one—the one that was coming.

It was Wilkins's first news of the one that was coming. He blanched under it visibly, and his eyes drooped irresolutely to the edge of the carpet. Perhaps, after all, he had best—but not yet!

"They'll look after him all right," he tried to assure her, but the strain in his voice sounded, to her ears, like the ring of indifference. She turned on him indignantly, a flash of anger through her tears.

"How queer you are, Rudolph! I don't believe you would care very much if Ruddy died!"

THE LONG tension snapped. Something flared, like a fiercely lapping flame, through the murk of the jeweler's mind. He answered her furiously, his words lit by that passionate glare.

"And *you* wouldn't care if they sent me to the penitentiary!"

"What do you mean?" she broke into a wail, painfully harassing." "Oh, my baby! Oh, my baby! I want Ruddy. Oh, I want Ruddy."

"You may want your husband," Wilkins said savagely. "You say I don't care for the child, but I care enough for this—that I'd rather he died than have him live to see his father in prison. And that's where I'll be if I can't produce the diamond. If I can't produce it, I'm ruined, Ruddy's ruined, and—the one that's coming!

She stopped crying and looked at him out of frightened eyes.

"But we can pay for it! Can't we pay for it, Rudolph?"

The jeweler laughed, a harsh laugh, taut with strain.

"Yes, if they'll let me and I can realize that much. The house and business will both have to go."

Yes, and that hard-bought collection, though Wilkins didn't add that. It would mean nothing to her!

Instead of shock, as he anticipated, she displayed instant relief.

"I don't care if we lose everything, if only Ruddy lives!" her voice rose hysterically. "Oh, God, give back Ruddy! We don't care about the diamond!"

Not care about the diamond! Not care about his honor, his reputation, his liberty, even! Madness leaped to his brain. He sent up a counter-petition, its crude violence more like an oath.

"God, I'll give everything I've got for the diamond—everything I've got!"

Before the words were half uttered, his wife's voice rose with them, struggling for mastery. He would give everything! He would give Ruddy!

"How dare you? Oh, how *dare* you? What if God answered that prayer!"

THE telephone jangled. Wilkins went to it with relief, glad of the break in the scene. It was the hospital that called. Doctor Trull, their own physician, was talking, but his voice sounded strange. There was a reticence about it, an unusual hesitance between words.

Mr. Wilkins? Oh, all right!—he didn't know but it might be Mrs. Wilkins. Could they—Mr. Wilkins, anyway—come over at once? They had something to tell him.

"Oh, yes," in answer to Wilkins's question—"they had operated, but the child wasn't out of the ether. Would Mr. Wilkins come right over? Doctor Trull became enigmatic—you see, the hospital didn't feel that it wanted the responsibility.

Wilkins hung up the receiver and turned a white face to his wife. The message could mean but one thing—Ruddy was dying. He tried to break the word to her gently. To his surprise, she took the news quietly.

"I knew it would kill him!" she said. She didn't say what, but Wilkins felt like the child's murderer. His prayer rang back—an accusing echo, in his ears. "God, I'll give everything I've got for the diamond!" He hadn't meant Ruddy—but one cannot barter with God!

AS THEIR car passed through the hospital gates she spoke again:

"I want to kiss him good-night. Do you think there'll be time?"

In a waiting-room off the wide hospital corridor, Doctor Trull met them with the brave, cheerful smile his large clientele loved in him.

"I'll take you right up to the nurse and let her tell you about it."

Wilkins tried to frame a question, but his voice seemed stricken dumb. His wife, too, did not speak. She looked at the doctor with dry, burning eyes and twice Wilkins saw her put her tongue to her lips, as if to moisten them for speech that, after all, would not come.

The doctor pushed open a door that stood ajar off the second floor corridor and, still wordlessly, they followed him into a big, pleasant room.

Ruddy lay as if asleep, the long fringed lashes sweeping his little round cheeks, one chubby baby hand clasped on his breast. With a pang Wilkins recalled the sticky little fist clenched over the candy-treasure that fatal day when, God forgive him! a diamond had meant more to him than his *son!*

Bending over, the nurse touched

the little fist—not sticky now—too white—with tender fingers.

"He holds it so tight!" she said—"the baby! And he cried so when we tried to take it from him that we had to let him carry it to the operating table. And he has held on to it right through the ether!"

Very gently she unclasped the little fingers and reached the inert little hand toward Wilkins. In its open hollow lay a pool of glory.

WILKINS gazed at the stone with a curious fixity, like a sleep-walker. Then he reached one of those tapering, appraising fingers and touched it, turning it slowly. The light glittered on its facets like the sun on a snow-peak. There was no match for the gem except in a dream.

"Where did you find it?" he asked, like a dreamer awakening.

The nurse regarded him curiously. She had expected more surprise—more relief—yes, even more gratitude. But Wilkins looked a man stunned. It was the very magnitude of his loss, no doubt, that must match the magnitude of the stone.

"In the little pocket of the blue frock he wore over to us," the nurse answered. "We found it when we undressed him. It was stuck in a piece of candy that was stuck to his little hanky. At first we thought it was glass—it was so dirty and sticky—you know a child treasures rubbish like that! Then Doctor Trull remembered you saying something about a lost diamond, so we scrubbed it in soap and hot water. Then we knew.

"When we asked Ruddy about it, he began to cry and made such a fuss about our taking it that we had to give it back. When we were carrying him to the operating-room, he started to tell us something about it—that he had had a party and that there was a bag of 'presh'us jewels'—the funny baby! Then he seemed frightened and wouldn't tell us any more, but he tried to sing us a little song he said he learned in Sunday School about 'gems in Jesus's crown.'

" 'Jesus is a jeweler!' he said. 'So's my daddy! This is a presh'us——' Then he trailed off under the ether and didn't finish his sentence."

THE NURSE broke into a smile—so large, so tender, so sympathetic—yes, and so cheery, that the harassed mother-eyes, feeding on it, knew all at once Ruddy wasn't dead. If his little soul had gone faring out, no woman who had listened to his prattle, no woman with a heart in her breast, would be *smiling* at the baby's mother.

With a cry, she stooped over the bed and pressed hungry lips to the still little face, devouring it with passionate kisses, murmuring mother-words of endearment.

Away off where Ruddy had gone dreaming, perhaps in a happy play-garden of birds and flowers, he heard his mother's voice and came back, slowly, a reluctant little truant, with an uneasy stir of his curly head, a quivering of the closed eyelids, a soft little complaining that gathered into a whimper. Then his blue eyes opened wide and stared from one to the other of their faces, focusing last on the nurse's.

Memory picked up the dropped link and joined it to the chain. His little fist clenched again as if over the stolen treasure. He opened his baby lips and finished lustily the sentence he had left hanging for four hours.

"——jewel!" he said and broke into a reassuring roar.

"Thank God!" Wilkins cried, from his heart, the tears coursing down his cheeks. But it was not for the Cotter diamond that he thanked Him. All at once that seemed of small moment. He slid it out of sight in his pocket like the mere stone that it was.

SAND

By
VICTOR
LAURISTON

WHEN she found Colonel Harding's body lying beside the sand-hills path, Marie's first thought was:

"How will Arthur take this?"

Richard Kenton, kneeling on the thick carpet of pine needles, put the same thought into different words:

"This will knock poor Arthur all in a heap."

It had always been like that, since Arthur was little. While his mother still lived, her thoughts, like the Colonel's, had centered in Arthur. When Marie Peyton came to make her home with them, Marie fell into their habitual attitude of always considering Arthur.

Kenton it was who interjected the first discordant note. A husky, dependable young man, determined to make his way—no matter how—he had turned on the Colonel:

"It's Arthur, Arthur, Arthur," he almost snarled. "Uncle, why do you insist on babying that fellow? The way he's growing up, he won't have any gumption—any sand."

Colonel Harding, usually so hot-headed and impatient, for that once was mildly tolerant.

"Arthur," he urged, "is young. And now that he's all I have——"

Kenton was quickly contrite. Habitually, Kenton in those days spoke in haste to repent at leisure. In that, he resembled his uncle; he was more like Colonel Harding, indeed, than mild, placid, unresisting Arthur, though the latter was the Colonel's son.

IN TIME, despite himself, Kenton fell into the same attitude toward Arthur. What little he tried to do, he tried to do through Arthur himself.

"Don't let them baby you, boy," he urged. "You're good stuff — you couldn't be the old Colonel's boy and not be good stuff— but you need sand. Sand to stiffen your backbone a bit."

Arthur smile his placid smile. He never was impatient, he never lost his temper, he forgave much.

"You're right, Dick," he admitted.

That was just before Dick Kenton left to manage the Colonel's Louisiana oil venture—that luckless venture which put the elder Harding temporarily on the rocks. For that, though, Colonel Harding refused to blame Kenton. He was accustomed to financial ups and downs.

But Arthur worried over the financial outlook, for Marie and for himself. For Colonel Harding was getting to be an old man—too old for such hard knocks.

"Nonsense!" Kenton brusquely as-

sured Arthur. "The Colonel will come back. He's got any amount of sand, the Colonel has. You mark my word, he'll come back stronger than ever."

BUT NOW the Colonel had gone where he could not come back. All that was mortal of him lay stretched on this carpet of pine needles beside the sand-hills path.

Away over toward the lake, in the moonlight, the sand-hills towered bare and white and high; but here, where the second-growth pine was thick, the needles formed a sound-deadening carpet. And it was very dark here—so dark that Kenton could not see Marie's face, nor could she discern his.

That might be just as well, after what they had been saying down at the beach.

Kenton, kneeling, groped about the body. His fingers closed on something coldly metallic.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" demanded Marie.

"I never dreamed," muttered Kenton, "that he'd go out like this. Hard knocks never seemed to phase him. And that Calgary venture had just put him on Easy Street again. You'd better come to the cottage. I suppose," reluctantly, "we've got to tell Arthur."

Nettie Dawson, neat and precise, opened the door for them.

"Mr. Arthur? He's in the big room, Miss Marie. Or"—Nettie was always exact—"he was, five minutes ago."

"Still immersed in that new book, I suppose?" commented Kenton.

At their entrance into the big central room of the summer cottage, Arthur put down the book. He carefully marked the place—at page 70, Marie observed. He regarded them with his pale, placid smile.

"I've read a third through this thing," he commented, "and it's dull as ditch-water."

"Perhaps," whispered Kenton to Marie, "we'd better leave Mr. Beck to tell him."

So Arthur, resuming his book, remained in ignorance of what had happened, while Kenton stepped into the front room to telephone—first to Doctor Gresham, who was also coroner; then to Colonel Harding's lawyer. He left to Gresham the task of getting hold of the nearest county officer.

The men would, he told Marie, be here in a few minutes. They had merely to cross the bridge from the village and drive over the brief stretch of winding road to the cottage among the sand-hills.

THE LAWYER, Theobald Beck, arrived first. An old, paunchy, sleepy-looking man, slow of movement, hard of face, he had been Colonel Harding's close friend since they soldiered together in the Philippines. He had come down on Saturday for the week-end trout-fishing—and, incidentally, to draw Colonel Harding's will.

Kenton had scarcely finished telling Beck in low tones of what happened, when portly Doctor Gresham came, accompanied by the county officer, Lusk.

"You left him there?" asked Gresham.

Kenton nodded.

"Then we" — Gresham indicated Kenton and the officer—"will go now and get the body. You, Mr. Beck, break the news to young Mr. Harding." Then, as Beck grimaced at the unwelcome task, "Miss Peyton had best stay here, in case of emergency. You can't tell how the young chap will take it."

The three men, guided by the county officer's flashlight, made their way along the winding sand-hills path. Toward the lake, the sand-hills towered white and ghostly; to timid souls, their moonlit glare was scarcely

less awesome than the dancing shadows here amid the undergrowth.

"I never dreamed he'd do such a thing," volunteered Kenton. "Right after that Louisiana smash, one might have looked for it, but now. . ."

"Were you talking to Colonel Harding this evening?" demanded Gresham.

Kenton hesitated.

"Ye-es," he conceded. Then, more readily, "Less than an hour before."

Doctor Greham made no comment on his hesitation.

"Arthur wasn't at all well today," explained Kenton, "and—you know——"

"I know," bruskly. "If Arthur had a headache, even, the Colonel would worry."

Ten minutes' walk brought them to where the body lay. The officer's flash searched the scene, lighting at last on the revolver lying close to the dead man's outstretched hand.

"Did this belong to the Colonel?" Gresham addressed Richard Kenton.

"Sure. It's from the Colonel's collection. You know all those old weapons on the wall above the fireplace? This was the one modern weapon in the lot."

Gresham, having finished his examination, nodded, and Kenton and the officer took up the body. The walking was difficult; the two men with their heavy burden made slow progress in the loose sand. Gresham carried the flashlight.

As they neared the cottage, a wailing cry came to their ears. Kenton, shuddering, almost loosed his ghastly burden.

"It's Arthur," he muttered. "I knew he'd take it hard."

THE OLD lawyer, Beck, scowled as they laid the dead man on the sofa.

"That young fellow," he grumbled, "hasn't any sand. None whatever. The minute I told him, he went all to pieces."

"Arthur is young," urged Gresham.

"So is that girl, Marie," grumbled Beck. "It's hard for her, but at least she's trying to hold up. Oh, I got him to lie down at last. Now, I s'pose you're going to question everybody, eh?"

"I think not. It's all too plain to need much questioning."

Gresham was an old friend of the family, as well as a coroner. A vindictive probe was far from his thoughts. What he most desired was to make these difficult hours as easy as possible for his friends.

So he settled into a chair, and cloaked his questioning under the guise of low-voiced, sympathetic reminiscence of the Colonel as they had known him—bluff, hearty, impulsive, hot-tempered, a born gambler, with the gambler's inevitable ups and downs. Harding had gambled in mines, in oil, in real estate; had made money and lost money. Gresham knew that the failure of the Louisiana oil venture had stripped him.

"I was under the impression, though, he came back strong?"

The old lawyer nodded.

"He sold that Calgary well for big money. Eh, Kenton?"

"Just fair," said Kenton. "About sixty thousand for his interest."

"He left a will?" Gresham spoke.

"I drew it Saturday night," rejoined the lawyer.

So Gresham, without seeming too obtrusive, at last steered the talk to the happenings of the day.

"Arthur," put in Marie Peyton, in her sad, soft voice, "meant to spend the day with the Bancrofts. I pressed his suit, last night." She flushed prettily.

They all knew, though, that Marie's helping hand concerned itself pretty regularly with young Harding's faultless wardrobe.

"But," added the girl, "he didn't go. "He had one of his dizzy spells, and couldn't walk the distance. In fact, he didn't leave the cottage all day."

Gresham's suddenly averted face lit with an ironic smile. How characteristic! Even now, this girl was more concerned with Arthur's Sunday suit and Arthur's trifling illness than with Colonel Harding, who lay dead here.

"That," concluded Marie, "is one reason we hesitated to tell Arthur."

So Colonel Harding had spent the day pretty much with Arthur; except for his Sunday afternoon round of golf with Beck. Then, according to Beck, he seemed in perfect spirits.

Nettie Dawson had been the last to see him alive. Nettie, the neat, the precise, had the exact time-table at her finger ends. Miss Marie had left the cottage at 7.15 for a walk along the beach.

"Why," exclaimed Kenton, "he—the Colonel—told me Marie had taken the path through the sand-hills!"

Nettie stubbornly shook her head. "Anyway, he knew she went straight down to the beach."

An hour later, almost—at 8.10—Mr. Kenton had gone out. Right after that Nettie lit the lamps. She found Mr. Arthur and Colonel Harding in the big room. The Colonel wanted Mr. Arthur to go with him to look for Mr. Kenton; but Mr. Arthur had just got himself "settled comfortable" in the big chair and had just started a book; and, anyway, he was afraid he couldn't stand the walk. So the Colonel went out alone, the same way Mr. Kenton had gone.

"That," said Gresham, "would be about 8.15?"

Nettie assented.

"It takes ten minutes to reach the spot where—where you found him, Mr. Kenton? And you found him at 9.05. So he shot himself in the forty minutes between 8.25 and 9.05. When you were in the sand-hills, Mr. Kenton, did you hear a shot?"

Kenton shook his head.

"Ten minutes before I found him I was on the beach, with Marie. I went a long way through the trees, and then came back by the beach."

Gresham's curiosity began to tug. He would have liked to know what Richard Kenton and Marie Peyton had said while they were on the beach. Yet he disliked the thought of being tactless.

He turned to Marie.

"Did *you* hear a shot?"

"The lake was rough," muttered the girl. "The waves made a lot of noise. And we were talking. . . ."

Gresham studied. After all, what Marie had said to Kenton down there on the beach could have had nothing to do with Harding's suicide. Harding would have left the cottage, gone along the woodland path ten minutes' distance, perhaps spent a few hesitant moments. . . . It was all over, at 8.25 or 8.30, while Kenton was still in the sand-hills, before ever he found Marie.

"He might have come back to the cottage and gone out a second time?" suggested Kenton.

"In that case"—Gresham was suddenly acute—"he must have shot himself when you were with Miss Peyton at the beach?"

"No, Doctor Gresham," insisted the exact Nettie. "Colonel Harding did not come back."

She could tell exactly where she had been every moment of the time. She had been tidying up the kitchen till 8:35, when Mr. Arthur rang. He thought he was getting a chill, so she got him a hot-water bottle and some more covers and made him comfortable in the big chair. She was fussing in the big room till just a few minutes before Miss Marie and Mr. Kenton came in. If Colonel Harding had come back——

"I guess you'd have heard him," agreed Gresham.

A light, almost apologetic, step startled them. Young Arthur Harding had entered from the adjoining room. He was very pale, but composed now.

Gresham frowned; then got up and shook hands, with a murmured word or two of sympathy. It might, he mused, do the young fellow good to talk, even of the tragedy.

Arthur, mechanically returning the doctor's handclasp, sank into an easy-chair. For some moments there was silence.

"Talking of the will," blundered Beck, "what troubles me is that in all likelihood there'll be practically no estate."

"What do you mean?" sharply demanded Kenton.

"You see," said Beck, "the Colonel liked to play for big stakes. It was his ambition, Arthur, to leave you well-fixed, financially. I think that Louisiana smash frightened him. So when he cashed in on the Calgary proposition, he sunk most of the money in life insurance. That, he told me, was the quickest way to create a big estate, even if the premiums, at his age, were abominably high."

"You mean," demanded Gresham, "that he deliberately insured his life and then s h o t himself — to leave Arthur rich?"

A sob escaped the young m a n. Gresham, getting up, laid a comforting hand on Arthur's shoulder. Old Beck, he mused, had been a fool to open this topic.

"No, not that," said Beck. "I can't see that in the scheme of things. Harding understood t h e insurance policies. He must have. He showed them to me last night. And every policy contains a suicide clause. You understand—that if the insured takes his life within twelve months, the policies are void. As things stand, I'm afraid"—he shook his head, dubiously—"those policies aren't worth the paper they're written on."

DOCTOR Gresham pooh-poohed the idea, and tactfully shifted back to his unobtrusive questioning. Patiently, addressing now Marie, now Kenton, now the precise Nettie, now young Arthur Harding, he gathered what few facts he still needed.

Once or twice he regarded Marie Peyton with a critical eye. What had Kenton said to her, what had she said to Kenton, down on the beach, while her benefactor, Colonel Harding, lay dead in the pine thicket?

Arthur presently got to his feet, painfully, and tottered to the mantel.

"Is that"—he shuddered—"the revolver?"

Gresham assented.

"The same revolver that was up there?" The young fellow pointed to a vacant peg above the fire-place.

He stared, fascinated, at the weapon. Then, apologetic, he glanced, first at the coroner, then at Beck. His odd look puzzled Gresham.

"What is it, Arthur?"

"I'm wondering," muttered Arthur. "Why—why, if he was shooting himself, did the governor use a silencer?"

His tone was almost apologetic.

"The silencer wasn't on that revolver before? Eh, Dick?"

"Why, no!" exclaimed Kenton.

Coroner Gresham caught the idea.

"You mean—it wasn't suicide?"

"Nor accident."

"B u t w h o," interpolated Beck, "could have killed him? And with his own revolver? Yet someone must have killed him — else w h y t h e silencer?"

Arthur Harding looked dubiously at Kenton.

"Who," repeated Beck, "could have done it? W h o w o u l d have any motive?"

Arthur sank back into his chair,

His effort had overtaxed his strength. Beck thought, involuntarily, of Colonel Harding's soldiering days in the Philippines. As the older Harding had fought his way back to health, so now the younger man seemed to fight for strength to follow up what was in his mind.

"Motive," Arthur at last muttered. "I don't know. There might have been—someone slinking in the woods. He, though, never suspected an enemy."

With his effort he seemed to gather strength. "I remember when he left. It hurts, now. You'd gone off through the sand-hills, Dick, in a bit of a huff, to look for Marie.

"The governor came in here. 'I guess I was a bit rough with Dick. I'll run after him and smooth things over. How'd you like to come along, Arthur? The walk ought to do you good—you've not been out all day.'

"Well, I'd just got comfortably settled and started that infernal book. I got up, though, and then I felt wobbly. But now I wish I'd gone. Not that I was in any shape to put up a scrap. But—seems petty now—I hated to walk in the sand."

GRESHAM was perturbed. An easy-going man, disliking unpleasantness, he dreaded what might follow. It was Beck who spoke. Sharply he addressed Kenton:

"Then you quarreled with Colonel Harding?"

Kenton flushed.

"We had a—er—an argument." Then, as Beck's grim look insisted: "It was just before I went for that walk."

Appealingly, he turned to Gresham.

But Gresham, reluctantly, nodded him to go on. Naturally he wished to make things easy for these people; but he could not ignore an obvious trail like this.

"What," he asked, "was the argument?"

"Uncle mentioned that Mr. Beck had drawn his will."

"Everything to Arthur," supplemented Beck. "Except some highly speculative oil properties. They went to you."

"So he told me," returned Kenton. "I said: 'And what about Marie?' He said: 'Of course, Marie is provided for. Marie will marry Arthur.'"

Kenton halted. Marie, staring at the red rug, shared his embarrassment.

"That," said practical Beck, "was always the Colonel's idea. Legally, you," he turned to Marie Peyton, "had no claim."

"As it was," quietly interpolated the girl, "I owed him everything."

"So far," commented Gresham, "I see no room for dispute."

"None whatever," agreed Beck. He frowned on Kenton. Kenton, his frown intimated, must have been too hot-headed. "Arthur, the only son, gets the proven values. Kenton, the nephew, gets the speculative stuff. A sane division. I counseled that, myself. And Marie would, of course, marry Arthur. Where could any dispute come in?"

Kenton, flushing, felt compelled to explain.

"About Marie's marrying Arthur. I told him—well—that I——"

Marie's fair face crimsoned.

"That you," finished Gresham, unwontedly acute, "had aspirations?"

Gresham understood. Beck understood. Colonel Harding, well-meaning, kind-hearted, impulsive, when his plans were crossed flared into hot anger.

Ever since he took Jim Peyton's girl into his home, it had been his cherished plan to marry her to Arthur. With her self-reliant good sense she was just the sort of wife,

placid, easy-going, apologetic Arthur needed.

"Always considering A r t h u r!" mused Gresham. Aloud, he added:

"The Colonel got angry?"

"Both of us got angry," admitted Kenton. "He told me he had to consider Arthur. I told him that, for once, he might consider Marie. He said Marie would do just what he wished. I said I'd speak to her, anyway. He told me I couldn't speak too quick to suit him; that she'd gone for a walk in the sand-hills. So I went to look for her. I wandered for a half-hour or more along the sand-hill paths; then I thought of the beach. I found her there."

Gresham's curiosity tugged hard. He wanted to know what answer Kenton g o t from Marie — pretty Marie, who just now was intently examining the pattern of the red rug. But was such a question considerate, and did it really concern his problem?

B e c k, lawyer-like, pursued evidence:

"That was everything passed between you and the Colonel?"

"Everything."

"Did you encounter him later, in the woods?"

"No. I had gone ahead, along the path, a considerable distance looking for Marie. At last I struck across to the beach."

"How long were you talking to her on the beach?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes."

"You were accompanying her to the cottage when you found the body?"

"Yes."

"At what time did you reach the cottage?"

"About 9:15."

"W h e n y o u came in," flashed Arthur, "you already *knew* what had happened! Yet you did not tell me?"

Marie spoke:

"You had been ill. Indoors all day —we didn't know just how you'd take it."

Again Doctor Gresham cast that curiously searching look at the slim, fair girl. And now he felt his question justified:

"You were ten minutes together at the beach. What did Mr. Kenton ask you?"

"If I would marry him."

"And you said——?"

"He told me, t o o, what Colonel Harding had said about Arthur. And I said Colonel Harding had been very kind to me. I ought to consider his wishes. A n d, anyway, there was Arthur to consider, too."

ARTHUR sat queerly in that huge easy-chair. Against the pallid background of his face his dark eyes gleamed. He seemed with a prodigious effort to pull himself together.

Again B e c k thought of Colonel Harding in the Philippines, fighting his way to recovery from a wound that would have killed most men.

"You all think," Arthur's whisper was oddly clear, "I have no sand. What I'm trying to do, must do, takes sand. I'm going to dig the truth out of all this. Work it out. See?"

"The truth?" challenged Gresham.

"The truth, whoever is hurt," the young man doggedly insisted. "Yes, even if it hurts—*you.*'

He glanced at Marie.

Beck spoke, in a hard tone:

"The guilty must be punished."

"Whoever," went on Arthur Harding, in that deadly quiet tone, "took that revolver, had seen it there." He indicated the vacant peg above the fire-place. "Someone inside. You understand? With a motive. It might be you, Mr. Beck."

The old lawyer scoffed.

"Me? The hotel people can tell you where *I* was?"

"Or Marie. Or Dick Kenton. Or it might be me."

"You?" exclaimed Gresham.

"Why not? We must all submit ourselves to the same process of elimination."

"Oh, but," protested Gresham, relieved, "even if you insist on that, you're eliminated."

"I have the motive to—well"—his tense look merged in a ghastly smile, —"to—oh, to cinch the governor's momentary prosperity before he gambled it all away again."

"But, Arthur," tolerantly interpolated Richard Kenton, "you—haven't the sand."

"Now," went on Arthur, tensely, "take those forty minutes—from 8:25, when the governor reached there, to 9:05, when he was found. Where—to begin, where was I?"

"You were right here," said Gresham. "Eh, Nettie?" Nettie nodded precise confirmation. "You were alone for barely twenty minutes. And even in good health you could hardly have run there and back in twenty minutes."

"And you, Marie?"

"I was at the beach."

"Alone?"

"Except for those ten or fifteen minutes with Mr. Kenton."

"You, Kenton?"

"Except for those ten minutes with Marie, I was wandering through the sand-hills looking for her — further on," he hurriedly protested, "than where we found the Colonel."

Again that ominous word:

"Alone?"

Then, after a moment's silence:

"Alone? Consider just when we were each alone. I for those twenty minutes—here, reading. Marie, thirty minutes—at the beach. Dick, here, thirty minutes—far over among the sand-hills. How do you know where we were? You have no word. Nothing more. Now—motive?"

All eyes turned to Kenton.

"But," protested Gresham, "you don't mean, Mr. Harding, that Mr. Kenton——?"

BECK looked at Arthur. Again, but through a blur, he saw Colonel Harding in his Philippine days, fighting his way back from the Valley of the Shadow, revealing in his callow youth an unsuspected hardness of purpose. "And we all thought," mused Beck, "*he* hadn't any sand!"

Marie, he noticed, oddly regarded Kenton. Then she looked at Arthur. Her eyes were wide, with mute appeal, Beck thought—and then she burst into words oddly inapropos:

"Why, Arthur, that is the suit I pressed only last night,—and you've never worn it outside the cottage."

"Always considering Arthur!" mused Gresham.

The girl's suddenly uplifted gaze seemed to question Richard Kenton. Richard Kenton ever so slightly shook his head. What, Gresham stupidly wondered, lay between them since those ten minutes at the beach?

It was Beck, keen personification of ineluctable justice, who read the message of the girl's eyes, that message Kenton would have suppressed. Beck spoke Marie's thoughts, not in words, but in swift, significant action. Stooping, he gripped the cuff of Arthur Harding's newly-pressed trousers.

"You cold-blooded malingerer. Never out of the house all day!"

Ever so slightly his grim old fingers twisted the cuff and, slowly, steadily—accusing, betraying, poured forth on the red rug a tiny rivulet of sand.

Why Poppies?

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row.

AGES past ancients believed that the souls of the departed were re-incarnated in flowers or trees.

There is a story of two lovers who planned to marry but were thwarted by the hatred of the father of the girl for the boy. Each evening the youth would come to the wall surrounding the home of his beloved and as the moon shone down upon him he would gaze at her window. But with the paling of the moon he would disappear. For this was the sign to him that soon would come the dawn and discovery by the irate parent of the girl he adored.

And each morning the maiden would come to her casement and look out over the country and silently weep for her lover; for neither saw the other.

At last the lass died and was buried beneath the wall where formerly she had met her lover; and the young man would come each night, and in the moonlight kneel beside her grave and weep. And soon he, too, died of grief. Whereupon the father of the girl relented and the young man was buried beside the maiden he had adored.

And from the grave of the youth there grew a moon-flower vine which clambered over the wall seeking ever to reach the casement whereon his loved one had rested her arms as she had looked for him. And from the grave of the maiden there grew a morning-glory vine with blossoms as blue as her eyes and they were wet each morning with dew. For even in death she was unable to see the one she loved. As in life he disappeared each dawn with the setting of the moon.

This tragically beautiful story was an outgrowth of the same ancient belief that made the peasants of France say, after the Battle of Waterloo, that the carpets of red poppies that blossomed in such profusion in the fresh plowed fields were the souls of the dead soldiers who had given their blood for France.

Thus, one hundred years later, in the World War we find Col. John McCrae symbolizing the same ancient belief in a poem that is possibly as deathless as Ypres and the Marne.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That marks our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

A Fool Like Him

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

A FAINT smile played about the mouth of the man by the stove. Dan Hale, washing the supper dishes, met it whenever he looked that way.

Every evening for many weeks that smile, as uncertain as the light of a hazy moon, had glimmered across the face of Andrew Bowen. If it seemed mocking when he was silent it became quite natural as soon as he began to talk. Every tone of Bowen's voice was invariably friendly.

He had come offering to work in the woods with Hale that winter, for wages; and Dan had been glad to get a neighbor whom he knew to be a reliable man with an axe. Bowen had put up cord for cord with him, and the long ranks of wood had grown steadily.

It was by Dan's own choice that he was washing dishes. A neat and rather particular man, he preferred to do the cooking and other work in his house. To him the house had something of a human quality; he knew how it liked to be treated.

The hardwood fire in the cookstove purred; it snapped now and then with the comforting assurance that twenty below zero outside would not make any difference in that kitchen. Silence except for this and the ticking of the big wooden clock that had served three generations of Hales; the clatter of a plate now and then and the soft pad of Dan Hale's shoepacks as he stepped about the room.

A deep-chested, powerful man of medium height, he walked lightly; and there was a precision in his movements which came from years of handling the axe.

"Most through?" asked Bowen, straightening up in his chair. Habitually he sat with elbows on knees; semi-thoughtful, touched by that flicker of smile. As he drew himself

erect his long frame sprawled over the chair, revealing him as larger than he had seemed with shoulders bowed.

His long, narrow face followed the movements of Hale, with a lock of mouse-colored hair flopping down upon a white forehead. Neither wind nor glare from the snow tanned him; a little burn was all that touched his fair complexion. A good-looking man, with his clear skin and his gray eyes; but he gave a slanting effect in his gaze and in his walk.

"You in a hurry?" asked Dan good-naturedly. He glanced with meaning at an earthenware jug that sat upon the cleared table. "Go to it, if you want to!"

"I lugged that three miles," said Bowen. "Hard going, too! There's too much soft snow on top of the crust. My snowshoes dragged."

"Never mind!" exclaimed Hale cheerfully. "It's our Thanksgiving present to ourselves!"

"And the only one we'll get!" Bowen grunted. Then he laughed with a short, hard sound. "Well—you ready?"

"Get the glasses and shoot! I've got to feed the cat—most forgot her!"

"You'd stop to feed some fool animal if you had an invitation to heaven!" grumbled Bowen, as he brought glasses and tipped the full jug carefully over so that the cider would flow without spilling.

"Come on, pitty puss!" Hale went into the pantry and returned with a saucer of milk.

"Yur-r-rp!" said a fat and self-possessed cat. She brushed against the large and capable hand that put the saucer down before her.

"She's a good cat," remarked Dan as he walked to the table and lifted the glass that Bowen handed him. "Best luck, Andy! Three hours to go yet before Thanksgiving morning, but it's all the same!"

Bowen had taken a sip. He swallowed slowly and lifted his slanting gaze to meet Dan's eyes; he met them steadily. They were blue eyes, darkened somewhat in the lamplight; wide and smiling but with a little peculiarity of expression, as though a shadow which would not lift rested upon the face of Dan Hale.

"Drink hearty!" said Bowen, in a low voice.

Bottoms up, and the heavy tumblers went down with a thud upon the table. Hale expanded the chest that arched out the knitted ribs of his sweater and slid into a chair before the fire. With leisurely fingers, he proceeded to fill his pipe.

"That's good cider, Andy! Got a nice tang, and a good flavor, and it won't do us a bit of harm. Not enough power!"

"I wouldn't mind a jolt of dynamite, myself," said Bowen. He went back to his chair and leaned forward, cupping his face in his hands. "Or carbolic acid!"

"Cheer up!" cried Dan. "Maybe there's a little conversation in that jug, after all! Six weeks of steady chopping, and Thanksgiving Eve! We've been to bed every night at nine o'clock!"

"What a life!" Bowen fastened his searching gray gaze upon the face of Hale. "I can quit any time I want to and besides I'm used to living alone, but I should think you'd get tired of it! Some different from last winter for you!"

Dan Hale quivered. It was as though he had been stricken by a blighting pain. Last winter was something he was trying to forget. All his days were given over to the effort to live only in the present; and in those bleak hours of the night when he awoke, in spite of a day of furious labor, he got up and lighted a lamp and tried to read. He had subscribed for a dozen magazines

when he found that reading turned his thought away from the past.

He realized that Bowen was watching him, and waiting for a reply. It had been pretty thick-skinned of Andy to speak like that, he thought. Like everybody else, Bowen knew that Dan Hale's wife had left him; knew more about it, for he had been in the habit of coming in oftener than most of the neighbors. At this moment it seemed that the flicker of a smile passed across that long, white face; Bowen went over to the table with his loose, easy swiftness and turned out more cider.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "Get two or three of them into you, and you'll feel better! You look pale as a sick ghost! 'Sposed you'd got over thinking about Hazel. Ever hear from her?"

HALE drank, and followed that glass with another. He seldom drank even the cider which was universal in the mountains, and these few glasses had some slight effect upon him. They eased the tension of that restraint which he had placed upon himself for the past year. A genial man, he was nevertheless reticent as to his personal affairs; now, however, at the right moment he had received the impetus to push him through the wall of reserve that he had built.

"It was the day before Thanksgiving last year when I got home and found she'd gone," he said, in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh!" Bowen was back in his chair, elbows on knees, watching the face of Hale. "Never heard just when she went."

"She left before I got home." Hale stared at a little opening in the stove through which the fire glowed red. His mind went back into that time of a year ago and he spoke mechanically, like one thinking aloud. "I'd been away a lot, 'tending to a job I had in the lumber woods up behind Placid, and selling lumber and pulp wood, had to hang around a lot with a dealer and his family in Plattsburg and go to moving picture shows and hotels with 'em to be agreeable. I got tired of it, and I tell you I was mighty glad when I started for home so's to get here for Thanksgiving. But—Hazel had cleared out!"

"Was she sore about something?" asked Bowen.

"You knew her," said Dan monotonously. "She was hasty, in a way, but we never had any trouble. I don't know what she went away for. She left a note, and I guess I've read it over a thousand times. 'I'm going my way. You can go yours.' That was all she said. I couldn't find her. You can trail anybody out of the mountains but as soon as they get to a railroad that's the end of 'em. Or onto the state road where a car can run good. Never heard from her since."

"Must have been sore," repeated Bowen. "Or—maybe——"

"We never had any trouble except a little, because I was away so much." Hale found it a relief, after his long silence, to talk on to that glowing spot in the stove. It was not so much that he was making a confidant of Andrew Bowen as that he was easing his overcharged mind. "Had to be away. I was making a lot of money. It was all for her. I'd been gone six weeks that time. Drove up from the Corners with a cutter full of stuff for Thanksgiving. I had a ten-pound turkey. No smoke from the chimney. The key was hanging on the nail side of the back door. Took me all night and half the next day to believe she wasn't around somewheres!"

"Must have been some good reason!" Andrew Bowen cleared his throat. "Got to be a reason for a thing like that! Maybe——"

For the second time he let his voice drop off significantly after that word. Dan came out of his absorption, glanced up, and read the unspoken thought. It was one that had come to him again and again; sometimes to be kicked out of his mind with fury and indignation and sometimes to be entertained in bitterness and rage.

"You mean—somebody — another man?" he growled. "Why don't you say so? I don't believe it! But if it was, and I ever run across him, I'll kill him!"

"You wouldn't kill him." The contradiction from Bowen came slowly, with conviction but without offense in tone. Hale stared, astonished.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Andy!"

"I know, all right!" shrugged Bowen. "I know a lot better than you do. Fellows like you don't kill people. You'd have to get pretty damn hungry to shoot a rabbit!"

"That's all right, but this is different!" exclaimed Dan, huskily. "I've got so I don't feel the same as I did —don't care any more—about money —or anything. I'm just working to keep busy."

"I should say you didn't care about money, the way you leave it around! That tin box you got in your bedroom was full when you paid me the other day."

"Yes, I didn't bother to go to the bank all last fall. Sold a lot of wood for cash, too." Hale's slight exhilaration was wearing off and with the change of the conversation to money he lost interest; his chin dropped to his chest, he slumped lower in the chair and retired into his own mind. What could anybody else understand of the difference that Hazel's going had made to him?

HER bobbing black curls had filled the kitchen with life; her laughter had rung where now there was only the slow ticking of the clock through long hours. At night Dan had sat with her while she washed the supper dishes; sometimes he had wiped them for her. After that the cheerful living-room with Hazel busy across the table from him—talking, sewing, smiling whenever he looked up. That room was closed now; it stabbed him to enter it.

"You'd ought to make some provision about all that money," Bowen was saying. "She'd inherit it if anything happened to you. Or maybe you have. Anyway, it's none of my business."

"What's that, Andy?" asked Hale, coming out of his revery with the words still sticking in his mind. "Oh —I don't care if she does get it. What difference would it make if she did."

"That's a funny way to look at it!" Bowen laughed, with little points of light gleaming in his eyes. "You don't want a woman you're sore at to get your property, do you?"

"Sore?" echoed Dan. "I didn't say I was sore—not at Hazel!"

"You said you'd kill the man, if you ran across him."

"Sure, I would! If there was one."

"Well—he'll get the benefit of your money, if you don't happen to run across him!"

"Like as not, Andy. But what's the use of being mean about a little money, after you're dead? Killing him now would be one thing—but playing a mean trick on Hazel to get at him would be kind of a back-handed joke."

"Joke! Good Lord, man! You're a joker, and you don't know it!"

"If I'm a joker, I don't get much fun out of it!" grinned Hale, amiably. "Let's have another glass of cider and go to bed."

"Right," agreed Bowen. "I'm all ready to sleep, even if we did knock off early. What say we work to-

morrow? I don't want to go anywhere, and working will be better than stalling around the house all day."

"Sure!" said Dan. They clinked glasses. "Here's how! The more I work, the less I think, and if you want to chop on Thanksgiving, I'm agreeable!"

A moment later Dan Hale knocked out his pipe and wound the clock, while Bowen took his lamp and climbed the stairs. Then Dan found the cat and considered putting her out, to decide at length that it would be too cold. The frost on the kitchen windows had thickened perceptibly during the evening. These three duties were the last of the night, and invariably they were done in the same way. He always decided against putting the cat out. Now she rubbed, purring, against his legs.

Hale went into the ground floor bedroom which had always been his, even before he had brought Hazel home, five years since. The little things she had left about the room were all put out of sight now; they had been too poignant reminders of the nights when she stood there before the mirror, ruffling her curls. But her picture, the one she had had taken for him the summer before she left, stood framed on the bureau.

A saucy face looked up at him; the head held high, the eyes hinting defiance of the world. Deep black her eyes had been; her hair black with the sheen of silk. The small, round face in the photograph was honest and unafraid, and very daring. Hale knew that there must have been some powerful reason for her going; he knew also that if she had fallen in love with another man that would explain it.

She would go, regardless of consequences, on the impulse; and however bitterly she might repent, she would never admit it. She would never come back seeking forgiveness. If only it had been the other way around, and Dan Hale the sinner! He knew how, in that case, she would forgive him after the first wild flare of anger. He sighed, catching his breath with a sound that was akin to a groan. That was the way things went. She would have forgiven him but she would never forgive herself. Yet she would know, always, how ready his heart would be to receive her.

THE next morning Hale got up at the usual hour. Ham and eggs and potatoes were frying, filling the kitchen with delicious smells, when Andrew Bowen came down. He came shivering, with the lock of hair flopping over one eye and his broad shoulders hunched against the cold as he hurried to the stove.

"I'll bet it's more than twenty below today!" he exclaimed.

"Twenty-eight below," Dan told him, flapping an egg over skilfully. "I'm glad I didn't put the cat out last night!"

"You never put that cat out!" snorted Bowen. "How do you fool yourself every night into thinking you're going to?"

"Well, I might do it some time," grinned Hale. "Some night during a thaw when she won't get her ears nipped."

"Then you'd be afraid she'd get her feet wet," said Bowen, as he sat down at the table. "We'll have to make the chips fly today to keep warm. Let's tackle that big oak we left yesterday."

"The one with so many limbs?"

"Why not? So much more chopping after we get her down."

"All right," agreed Dan. "The oak it is."

Half an hour later they were on the wooded slope where they had been working of late; jackets flung

on top of one of the ranks of four-foot wood and their checked shirts vivid against the black and white background of the forest. Here Andrew Bowen went through the deliberate preliminaries in which he had indulged before the cutting of every big tree that their axes had met during the winter.

HALE was in the habit of taking account with a few casual glances of the way the tree hung, and how it was best to fell it. Andrew, however, spent minutes in his scrutiny. Now from half a dozen angles he peered up into the spreading limbs of the oak, many of which were as big as the body of a man. He measured distances with the eye. And all this was useless, for Dan had taken out a chip to indicate where he was going to make the first cut. The tree would fall in that direction.

Dan stamped the snow down to make sure of his footing and began to chop; indifferent to the manner in which Bowen occupied himself until he was needed at one end of the crosscut saw. The oak chips soared, the steady smacking thud of the axe rang through the keen morning. Hale grew warm, his breath hung in a cloud, and every intake of that sparkling morning filled him with a renewal of life. It was only at such moments as this that he rose above the shadow of his trouble.

When he stood back, with the notch sunk to a sufficient depth, Bowen was waiting with the long saw. They knelt in silence, one at each end of the saw. The steel sang and the teeth ate in from the side opposite to the cut Hale had made; sawdust sprayed out upon the snow in little spurts. The rhythm of sound and movement was unbroken until they had sawed nearly through the trunk.

Bowen seemed to be lagging a little this morning. It was Hale who went for the steel wedges and maul; who drove a wedge into the cut, took one handle off the saw and pulled it out. He swung the maul again and the oak gave out an ominous crack. A few more solid blows against the wedge and the tree would topple over; and for the first time Hale began to take particular notice of the actions of Andrew Bowen.

Bowen had moved around in a semi-circular fashion, staring up into the tree, until he was perilously close to the place where it would fall. In this instance it was hardly possible for the tree to swing off to one side. Bowen had only to move a few feet to stand in the path of death or serious injury.

As Hale looked at him in surprise, he moved farther, and stood directly upon the spot where the thickest of those great limbs would come crashing down. A man cannot move quickly in a foot or more of snow. Bowen might have time to jump to safety after the crackling downward swing began, but the foolhardy risk was more worthy of a half-grown boy than a mature man.

"Look out, Andy!" cried Hale, holding the maul poised. "She's going to go in a minute!"

Bowen lowered his gaze and met the warning of Hale with a twisted grin. He looked pale, Dan thought. Sick? Hardly; he had eaten a hearty breakfast.

"Go ahead!" he called, in a harsh voice. "Don't be a baby! I'm all set to jump, and I want to see her crash close to!"

Growling to himself about fools and their ways, Hale brought the maul down; the wedge jumped a little farther into the track of the saw. The oak gave a popping crack. Another smart blow, and another. A snapping like firecrackers. A tremor went all through the darkly branching weight above the head of Hale.

Looking up, he saw the topmost twigs shift slightly against the clear blue of sky.

The trunk in front of him began to move perceptibly; the top was swinging now upon the beginning of its long arc. The crackling had become a staccato rush of sound. Hale's glance dropped from the tree to the white surface of the snow, which he expected to find cleared of Andrew Bowen.

Bowen was just starting to move. Suddenly he gave a cry which came through the sound of snapping wood. He stumbled, dropped to one knee, and clasped his ankle. In a matter of a half dozen seconds he would be crushed.

DAN HALE acted without thinking. Automatically he responded to that need there in the line of oncoming death. He shot forward past the swinging trunk and his strong hand caught the shoulder of Bowen to drag him to safety. He set his strength against the weight of the kneeling man—and then the unbelievable happened.

Bowen leaped to his feet and struck. His fist crashed against the mouth of Hale. For one instant Dan had a picture of his face, with that flickering smile blotted out by a grin of hate. Hale went down. The next instant Andrew Bowen was gone and the tree thundered to rest upon that spot.

In the little fragment of time during which Dan Hale sprawled upon his back with the black mass of limbs wiping out the sky as they swept down upon him, he expected to be killed. A blow from one of the larger limbs would crush life out of him instantly. As noise filled his ears and twigs beat upon his face he regretted that he was not killed instantly. To lie maimed and wait for the end by freezing. He flung out his arms—a small branch whipped painfully across his eyes and for a moment he lay blinded and helpless.

Whatever had happened had happened. The smarting pain in his eyes abated and he let the lids lift tentatively—he could see. Then he realized with antonishment that nowhere else was he suffering. At first he thought he had been so injured that his body had lost sensation. No—a foot moved to his will—a hand. Pinned down? He shifted his body ever so slightly and believed at last what had seemed incredible: he was uninjured and free.

For the first time the attention of Hale went away from himself. He remembered Bowen, and the blow. His eyes, wide open now, searched through the mass of branches. Sight and sound of Andrew Bowen came to him. The thud of Bowen's axe—his shoulders heaving in the gay shirt. Bowen dropped the axe and picked up a club he had just cut, weighing it in his hand. A good weapon, about two feet long and as thick as a man's wrist.

"He's going to make sure of finishing me!" The lips of Hale formed the words, but not aloud. No one would question how he had met his death if Bowen beat out any life that remained in him with a club—all done by the tree—that was what Andy was thinking. In this brief moment, in a flash of revelation, Hale understood why Bowen had so carefully looked over every spreading tree they had cut. He had been waiting for one with many big, wide-reaching limbs—a tree which could not fail to make a good job of it.

Dan let his eyes very nearly close again as Bowen turned, with the club in his hand. He came working in among the branches, and it was not a swift progress. Finally he was close at hand, peering down with a grunted curse. There was not much room to

strike. He came nearer. It was upon this necessity that Hale had counted. Suddenly his hands shot out and closed around Bowen's ankles. With all his strength he jerked backward.

Bowen fell. The club went spinning. His head struck a limb and the next instant Hale was upon him. They rolled together in the snow, fighting for holds, bracing themselves against the oak, gasping. Dan got his fingers inside the collar of Bowen and banged that narrow head against sound wood.

Andrew Bowen went limp. Dan got up, crouching, and dragged him out of the maze of the tree. He flung him down upon the trampled snow and stood bewildered, staring down at the form of the man who had just tried to kill him. He did not know what to do.

A LITTLE rectangle of leather that looked at the first glance like a pocketbook had fallen from the open front of Bowen's shirt, where the buttons had been torn away in the fight. Mechanically Dan stooped and picked it up. Then he held it with fingers which trembled so that they could hardly retain their grasp upon that leather case; stared at it with vision blurred by the shock of what he saw. Hazel—a duplicate of that photograph which she had given him—the same as the picture on his bureau—what was it doing here?

Gradually his mind cleared. Here was the reason why Bowen had wanted to kill him—Hazel would have his property. Why, Bowen had found out all he wanted to know last night! With Hale out of the way he could marry Hazel—marry ten or twelve thousand in cash and timber and woodland. All winter he had been finding out, making plans, waiting for a good chance!

With full understanding the picture dropped from the fingers of Dan Hale. He looked down and found himself staring into the eyes of Bowen—getting up, gathering himself, with a clasp knife open in his hand. Dan kicked and sent the knife through the air. He dropped, with a knee on each side of Bowen's chest, and took him by the throat.

The iron hands of Hale shut down, relaxed as quickly as they had closed, and fell away helpless. A little steady pressure and the world would be relieved of Andrew Bowen, but Dan could not do it. The eyes staring up into his own mocked him. Bowen coughed and fought for his voice.

"I knew you couldn't do it!" he whispered huskily.

Dan Hale got up with the feeling of great age. He stood away as Bowen rose with stiff movements, with the shadow of mockery laying about his mouth.

"Where is she?" demanded Hale, in a voice which he hardly knew for his own.

The look upon the face of Andrew Bowen was one of conscious power. Hale could not kill him, and he knew it; nor so long as he stood there with his hands down was he in any danger of a beating. Safe in insult and defiance.

"You won't find out, Dan," he said, "nor you won't see her again!"

Hale stood with fists clenched, shoulders thrown forward, wondering how all this had happened. This man had been his neighbor—in and out of his house freely—last night their glasses had clinked across the table.

"You wanted to kill me so you could marry Hazel and get what money I've got!" exclaimed Dan thickly. "She—she wouldn't—hurt me!"

Bowen laughed softly, and with a somewhat unsteady hand began to brush snow from the collar of his shirt.

"It takes you quite a while to figger things out!" he said. "No objection if I start for home, have you?"

Hale swung his arm hopelessly, a gesture of dismissal. There was a weary sag in his shoulders as he walked over to the rank of wood to get his jacket; he had no heart for more work that day. But as his hand reached out for the jacket he became as rigid as though he had been frozen there, leaning over the sticks of cordwood.

WAS THAT Hazel who was standing there a dozen feet away, staring at him with sober eyes grown a little hollow since last he had looked into them? It could not be real; he blinked and shook his head but the form did not clear away. He heard an incoherent cry from Bowen.

"What are you doing here?" shouted Bowen. He was white to the lips, with all the mocking self-confidence gone out of him.

She did not look at him; her gaze was fixed upon the face of her husband. Some great battle was being waged within her. Her breast rose and fell; her lips parted. The deep eyes Dan Hale knew and loved so well glowed with the light of some great emotion.

"Dan," she said, slowly. "Dan—I thought this would be a good day—to come and see you!"

"Hazel!" His voice was like the sound of chimes upon that clear air. "My little girl!"

He took a great stride toward her, and stopped. With a hand fending him back for the moment she was moving toward Andrew Bowen; now her eyes were blazing with a fire Hale had never seen there in the years he had known her. It withered the man; he shrank.

"I've been here quite a few minutes," she said, in a voice made labored by her wrath. "Dan made a mistake not to kill you!"

Andrew Bowen stumbled backward through the snow until Hale spoke and stopped his wife.

"What's the use, Hazel?" he asked simply. She turned and looked up into his face wonderingly. The fires of rage died and suddenly her little mittened hands went out to him; she leaned against the bulwark of his chest.

"Oh, Dan! Dan!" she cried. "You want me back—before you know the truth! Why—that sneak! When you were gone north on that last trip, he came to the house with a picture of you and a strange girl, taken together in the woods! He told me yarns—filled my ears—worked on my mind—but I didn't believe him until he persuaded me to go to Plattsburg with him. Said he wanted to show me—and we saw you go into a picture show with the same girl! It was then I left, and went down to Albany and got a job. He wanted me to get a divorce and marry him! But—I hoped you'd—change! Come after me, maybe! And I thought he was my best friend—and if he'd killed you today——"

She lurched at Bowen, and Dan caught her firmly in his arms. Over her head, he stared at Andrew Bowen; stared as a dog looks at a kind of insect new to him, with bewildered eyes and wrinkled forehead.

"Why, that was me with the girl, Hazel! Old Garvey's daughter. I sold him all my lumber! I wrote you I was going to stay at a lumberman's house a few days!"

Something like the old flicker of scorn passed across the face of Andrew Bowen; but this time he was the object of his own contempt. With a shrug he turned to leave them.

"I ought to have known I couldn't beat a fool like you!" he said.

The Secret of the Gods

By KATHARINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

Author of "Yellow Soap," etc.

A THREE PART STORY—PART TWO

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ANNE BELMONT, *whose father, a reported suicide, and grandfather collected small carved gods, is called home from a dance she is attending with* TONY STEELE, *the man she loves. When she arrives, she finds her grandfather dying from a stroke. But before he dies he begs her to keep the gods.*

Investigating the case, suspicion falls upon Harkins, the old family butler.

Anne finds herself without funds and accepts a position as secretary to T. BARRICAULT STEWART, *who was her father's and grandfather's friend, and who had been with her grandfather the evening he died.*

She receives a number of warnings not to accept the position but refuses to listen to them, thinking they are given for personal reasons.

When she arrives at The Shadows, STEWART'S *home, she finds it filled with hate and distrust. Weird happenings take place and* ALICE, ANNE'S *former maid, for whom* TONY STEELE *develops a sudden and surprising infatuation, seems to be her only friend, with the exception of* MR. STEWART.

At luncheon, on her first day at The Shadows, a strange moan is heard. Various explanations are given. MR. STEWART *later informs* ANNE *that he thinks it is* ESTHER, *his old cook, who is an epileptic. That afternnon* FELICIA, STEWART'S *daughter, appears at the library door to inform* STEWART *that* ESTHER *had been run over by a truck and killed that morning and had not returned for luncheon.*

CHAPTER VI.

CHOPIN'S "FUNERAL MARCH"

AS if he read my mind, Hale Stewart suggested that I go with him to the cellar to select from the wine-room any brand that I wished to drink with my evening meal. I accepted as my heart went down to my boots and my mouth grew dry.

"That's a nice thought, Hale," Mr. Stewart said, "we want—we want Miss Belmont to be *happy* with us and to have everything that we have, that she—she may want——"

He spoke more in the manner of an old man than he ever had before, and I was touched by it. Obviously, there was something sinister in the house; and obviously he was not protected against it. Perhaps, indeed, he did not realize it.

Being blind and "a little deaf"

would help to make him the dupe of the unscrupulous. And he—my grandfather's dearest friend, and the friend, too, of my own father, and my friend. There was work to be done in The Shadows, I decided.

Swallowing hard—and of nothing—I followed Hale toward the rear of the house where Alice and the lean, stooped maid were getting the meal.

"This way," said Hale, "and watch the steps. They're old and worn and steep."

THEY were all of that and more, too. For some reason someone had whittled at the top step with a penknife—rather, at the floor of the kitchen. Where the door opened to take one down to the second step the kitchen-floor was whittled so that one could see a streak of cellar from kitchen and kitchen from cellar.

"Careful!" Hale warned. He added: "When I was a youngster I was once punished by being locked down cellar and I thought to carve myself out."

It sounded well, but I happened to remember that Mr. Stewart had adopted Hale when he was a boy of seventeen, and because Mr. Stewart's wife had run off.

"There is too much space in my house," he had told my grandfather, "and someone who will help me must benefit by it!"

Hale had been the someone. Hale of seventeen. Now naturally a boy of that age would not think to whittle himself out of a cellar with a penknife.

I could see the knife had been small. *Anyone* could see the floor was thick and of hard wood. I gave it up as I followed Hale down the sagging, dusty stairs.

"We have to make a tour," he said. "The wine-cellar is quite at the end of all the corridors. They lead together."

I followed him, looking circumspectly but well, I thought, at everything I chanced to meet.

There were cupboards along the walls; filled, as I saw by aid of one or two gaping and sagging doors, with preserves, pickles—that sort of thing; a furnace and coal; the stairway that led from outside; the usual normal cellar things—piles of old furniture, kindling, the porch chairs, barrels, boxes—but n o t h i n g big enough in which to hide a tortured and groaning human.

I began to wonder whether the noise had been a device of my overstrained imagination. Yet I could not believe that. It still echoed too clearly.

When we entered the wine-cellar, after a turn of Hale's key and a creaking swing of the rusty hinged door, Hale spoke of the moan.

"We knew about Esther before," he explained, "but we didn't tell father. It would have upset him and he wouldn't have eaten his luncheon. The moan you heard this noon"—he paused, I nodded—"came from old Greenly, the old chap who attends to the grounds; he's always cared, in a queer, repressed way, for Esther, and Myra—that's the other maid—slipped down here this noon to tell him, while he was coaling the furnace."

"Very well," I thought, "that *sounds* well. But Miss Janette said today that you had not yet started the furnace, and that you were, instead, depending upon the heat from the fireplaces."

I said: "It's too bad——"

"And what will you have?" Hale questioned.

I selected a sauterne of not too great age, not wishing to make my demand an extravagant one. And, with its dusty container under his

arm, Hale locked the door of the wine-cellar and we turned back toward the stairs.

I could not see that anything was amiss. There were bins, as I said, cupboards, chimneys; cellar clutter. But no sign; no stain from that which I had suspected. And, anyway, as I had reasoned before, it was the Twentieth Century in which I lived, in which Felicia Stewart lived—if she were the trouble-maker. The police were within hail, and the dinner smelled actually good!

AS WE settled to dinner I heard Felicia Stewart playing the piano. Never have I heard such spirited, amazingly strong, strong playing. And it almost killed me, for she was beating out the Chopin's "Funeral March," simply pounding it from the piano.

"Felicia," Mr. Stewart called, "can't we have something more cheerful, my dear? You remember, Miss Belmont——" He paused, not wishing to say, I suppose, that thoughts of funerals could not be welcome to me. But Felicia Stewart's only answer was to intensify the strength of her notes, to bang the keys until I wondered that the strings of the piano did not break—to hurl her defiance of her father through the air with a tone.

She played for twenty minutes, I am certain, at the "Funeral March," over and over again. I saw that Mr. Stewart was angry; his chin was set hard and his face was pale. Miss Janette was breathing in short, sharp gasps and watching him. Hale, too, was staring at his plate.

At last Felicia came in to settle to her cold dinner. She ate quickly and without raising her eyes from her plate.

Mr. Stewart said, at length: "Was that kind, Felicia? Is it necessary? Just what, my dear, did you think it would do?"

It was a most uncomfortable minute. She made no answer save with the look she sent him, and that was enough.

Murder was in it, such hate as I had never seen: the wish for a fully indulged, slowly dealt, adeptly planned and acted killing.

I drank a good deal of that sauterne, naturally! And I found it bringing the blood back to my cheeks and steadying my heart beat.

"I want you to play for me after dinner, Anne," said Mr. Steward, "and something *cheerful.*"

Now Felicia glared at me. "It's my piano," she said stridently, "and I want no one—*no one* touching my piano!" I saw her hands clasp and unclasp. She leaned across the table and toward me, her eyes threatening me. And even with all those people around me, and so safe, I shrank back from the menace of her gaze.

"Anne will play for me," said Mr. Stewart. I had not dreamed he could speak so and I hoped I would not have to play, but I had to! He intended that I should, and perhaps he was right to so display, occasionally, his still wrong will.

Anyway, I played the most curious assortment of old things that he, I presume, had loved as a boy. It was fortunate that I read quickly and easily, because I had never before seen some of those old airs.

One particularly he loved, and asked me to play again and again. It was called, "Let Nothing You Dismay." Another that he favored was "Sleep Well, My Laddie!" and I knew that poor Mr. Stewart had need of such sentiment.

"Aren't they pretty tunes, Anne?" he questioned of me, as he sat by the

piano smiling and nodding in time to the songs.

I said I thought they were charming. And they were to me, because they gave to a lonely, disappointed old man so much of real happiness and pleasure.

When I was at length permitted to stop, Mr. Stewart himself, gropingly, closed the piano and managed to lock it.

"Don't think me cruel," he entreated, "but"—he hesitated; it was evidently difficult for him to go on—"my wife played that Chopin 'Funeral March' a great deal and for that reason it's difficult for me to bear it."

"Does your daughter know why you dislike it?" I questioned bluntly, and perhaps unwisely.

Mr. Stewart's face quivered. "Yes," he said.

AT TEN I went up to my room. I locked my door carefully. I remember my sense of shame as I tried the door to be certain that it was locked. Then I undressed and crept into the huge black walnut affair that was the mode before "twin beds."

I could not sleep and every sound, outside the house and in the house, magnified itself amazingly and cruelly. There was a cat fight which I imagined to be in the old summer-house. I never heard such yowling, hissing, long-drawn, nasal tomcat protests. Then suddenly this ceased; too suddenly!

The stillness must have been evoked by some one outside, I knew. I remembered Greenly, of whom Hale had spoken. Was he parading the grounds as he thought of Esther? And what sort was he? Whose friend in the land of spies and covertly warring factions?

There was a short lull then, a very short one, and it was broken by some one of soft tread who paced the front porch. After this ceased I heard, from below, Felicia beginning Chopin's "Funeral March"! That—in the middle of the night!

It came to me muted. She was evidently playing with soft pedal down, and some one must have interfered with her; some one who was near, for she had only played perhaps two measures when she ceased and a deadly, disquieting silence again settled.

In that silence I heard the tick of a small and distressingly elaborate French clock which stood on the tombstone-suggesting mantel. I turned on the night light which was by my bed, to see that the hands stood at two.

Then, for some reason that I cannot fathom, I got up to shut the windows which gave upon the porch roof, and to lock them.

I had hardly lain down and turned off my light, when I heard a noise outside; a scratching, clawing noise from the direction of the roof.

Something that seemed a man and yet not a man; it was rag-clad, longer-armed and more menacing than the worst man; this something was silhouetted against my window, and it went from one window to the other, trying to open each; pulling them, clawing them, scratching them.

I must, then, have lost consciousness, for I remember nothing more.

When I awoke there was nothing on the roof but the light of the moon, which had slipped suddenly from a bank of heavy, threatening storm clouds. The pines stood out, still and quiet; deadly quiet; ominously quiet. Nothing stirred in the silver, but I had an impression, as I looked from the side window, that something could stir, if it would, in the summer-house.

Staring at this, I saw the glint of

two yellow eyes. A cat, of course, I reasoned.

I turned on all the electrics in the room and, still sick and shaking, crawled back into bed to wait for the dawn. I would leave The Shadows in the morning, I decided.

I MUST have slept; I was awakened at six by the sound of sobbing. I opened my door. Felicia stood outside, the door into the main hallway closed after her and, I found later, locked. The intensity of her sobbing made me feel something for her that was close to pity.

"What is it?" I whispered. I laid my hand on her arm. She staggered into my room. Her negligee was parted and I saw she was still in her night robe. "What is it?" I repeated, as she sank to a chair.

"Ditridge," she whispered, "the chauffeur. Ditridge has been—has been—murdered. Hideously—cruelly—murdered! I cannot *live!*" she added in almost a scream; "I cannot *live!* His tongue cut out and his right hand cut off! I cannot *live!*"

CHAPTER VII.

FELICIA'S SHRINE

FELICIA sat staring at me, her lean, strong hands gripped between her knees until her knuckles were white; her eyes, fixed on mine, deep pools that were filled with terror.

I brought her a glass of water and held it as she drank. Her shaking was so intense that she could not hold it.

After she had drunk, she gasped: "Thank you. I think—I'm all right—now." She got up, to stand swaying a moment; then she turned, still swaying, and rather blindly made her way toward the door.

I watched her down the small corridor on which my room and two others opened and saw her hesitate by the door of the corridor which led to the main hall. She was listening and giving every strained nerve and energy to listening.

After a moment she unlocked the door with a stealth and a caution that again made me know her to be adept at both dark arts. And, the door unlocked, she opened it so gently that not the slightest sound was made, and so she slipped away.

I BATHED and dressed and to my irritation I found that my fingers were thickened and clumsy and unsteady. I did not want to be the coward I was. I craved, with all soul, the strength that had not been a part of "the tragic Belmonts," who, when too weak to hold what was theirs, ended hurt and disappointment by ending life.

Dressing, I thought of my father and of the way he had looked when, a child, I found him. And of my mother, one of those Russian blondes, whose beauty is a legend and worthy of being one.

She had been found dead and not long after my father's death. The last words he had written her were a charred relic in an otherwise empty fireplace; only a bit of blackened crest showing the letter to have been from him. And by my mother's hand, was a box of tablets which had shown her the way to the cessation of struggle.

I paused in my dressing, thinking of my mother and of my father, who, when tested by reverses, had shown their timber and who had given up. I drew a deep breath and then I made my vow.

I would stay at The Shadows; no threat made me, no terror made by the threat, would make me change my course. I had told Mr. Stewart I would work for him. I would work for him.

DOWNSTAIRS I found the family assembled at the breakfast-table and I have never lived through such a hideous stretch as was made by that meal.

Mr. Stewart's hand shook so that he could not eat; twice he whispered an old man's quavering, "Ditridge was so good to me! So good to me!"

Hearing him, I was more than ever glad I had decided on the only brave course, which was to stay. He needed friends and possibly protection.

Something eerie was in the house. I had learned that. And I knew that his isolation was cruel and absolute and that every soul in that room, save myself and the maids, would have done him harm if they could; the utmost of harm.

The second time that Mr. Stewart quavered out, "Ditridge was so good to me! So good to me!" Miss Janette Stewart dropped a cup and I saw the manner of its dropping; her bony hand had stiffened suddenly and then it had gripped, as if around a throat. And she was looking, as this happened, at her brother; and in her eyes was such hate as I had never seen before and such as, I hope, I shall never see again.

The cup shattered. Felicia started and sobbed. Hale Stewart had been staring at the center of the table and twisting a watch chain, knotting and unknotting it with a maddening monotony; but when Felicia sobbed he raised his eyes and I heard him breathe out a *"Dearest!"*

Suddenly I felt for him the sort of grudging pity I had that morning been forced, against my will, to give Felicia. Whatever their rôles, they were not happy in playing them; that I saw and plainly.

When Felicia sobbed again, and this was when Alice urged her, in Alice's loving, concerned way, to try a bit of the omelette, Mr. Stewart asked of Felicia a question which made for me the start of a problem that was to be not long unsolved.

"How was it, Felicia"—he asked, in his gentle way, staring straight ahead as he almost always did—"how was it, Felicia, that you found Ditridge?"

EVEN her lips went white. "I went out to give him the day's orders," she gasped; her eyes were wide and glazed by fear. She gave me a look that begged for mercy; I saw her trembling; she moistened her lips and went on: "My boudoir clock stopped. I thought it was—later—than it—was. I did not sleep well last night and I was restless. And so—and so instead of telephoning the garage I decided—I would slip out there and—I did. I thought the air—would do me good."

I remembered her negligee that was over her nightdress. It was odd, to say the least and to be the kindest, for a girl of Felicia Stewart's birth and rearing to go, in negligee and night robe, to the garage for the purpose of giving to a chauffeur the day's orders!

I dropped my gaze to my plate; of course she knew what I was thinking—what the least suspicious of mortals would think!

I felt myself chilling. It was so hideous, so murky, so soiling. Almost, it was the most disturbing hint that had come to me through my short residence at The Shadows.

"And then, what happened?" Mr. Stewart prompted in his soft, hesitant way.

Again Felicia moistened her lips; "I called Ditridge," she said, voice high and shrill. "He made no answer. I called again, loudly. Then I went up."

As she finished, she reached for a glass of water with an unsteady

hand, but, as earlier in my room, she could not lift it and instantly Hale Stewart was around the table and by her, holding it for her.

I had then, from his sudden tenderness, some hint of a hidden relationship between Felicia and him.

Miss Janette Stewart spoke crisply and loudly. "Finish your breakfast, Hale," she ordered; "I will take care of Felicia. And as she spoke she gave to him a long, level look that, I was sure, warned him against betrayal of self. Whatever their strange relation, she knew it; that I could see.

"I'll have to know more, dear," Mr. Stewart stated; "you know, I'll have to interview the police. So if you can tell me what you found, Felicia, exactly what you found, it will save trouble and perhaps save you the strain of being interviewed."

SHE drew a deep breath. "I called, as I said," she began; "I had no answer. I went up the stairs"—for a moment she paused, then, after another deep breath, she went on—"I found Ditridge's door unlocked. I opened it——"

She sank back in her chair; for a moment I thought she would faint, but, with a strength I was forced to admire, she pulled herself together to finish her tale.

"I opened it——" she repeated. "Then I paused. Ditridge was staked to the floor, a piece of leather over each wrist and nails through the leather and in the bare boards. His ankles, his body, his neck, were fastened in this same way. His mouth was open. Not much blood had streamed from it; I suppose most of it had slipped down his throat. His right hand, which had been cut off at the wrist, was over his heart. In the palm of his hand lay—his tongue. His eyes were wide and——"

Now she could not go on; instead, she covered her face and she rocked to and fro, shaking as I had never seen anyone shake.

Mr. Stewart said a sudden, broken, "Felicia, my dear little girl! I am so sorry, so sorry you have been dragged into *this!*"

Felicia grew rigid. She leaned across the table, beating it with her hands. "I hate you! I hate you!" she chanted. She smiled, yet sobbed while chanting it.

Miss Janette almost screamed, "Felicia!"

Hale grew white, his eyes on his foster-father. Mr. Stewart got up. Unsteadily he fumbled his way toward the door. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth——" I heard him murmur; voice trembling. Each one of us could add, did add, I imagine, the concluding, "it is to have a thankless child!"

FELICIA now turned her hysterical attention to me: again she beat the table with the hands that had been turned to little more than bone and an amazing amount of muscle by her endless piano practising.

"Go tell the world we know, how it is in this house," she ordered in a low yet loud monotone. "Go tell them I was the chauffeur's mistress; that my father is scorned and abused; that my brother is a parasite; that my aunt is a shrew. Go tell them how we have treated you!"

I stood up, and I gave to her the equal measure of her burning stare, although mine was cold and measuring.

"I am not going," I said definitely; "Mr. Stewart has not discharged me. And I enjoy working for him."

I left the room with my head high. I heard Felicia's high, thin, mocking laugh as I reached the hall. The girl who had come to me that morn-

ing sobbing, stood far from the girl who sneered at me, with a laugh.

I went upstairs; Mr. Stewart had to interview the police before we would start any work, if, indeed, we could do any work that day.

Half-way up the stairs I heard a repetition of the moan which had so startled and frightened me during my first meal at The Shadows. It was loud now, and again it seemed to come from below, and I knew it was not made by a dog, but by some tortured human being.

My heart lost a beat and my flesh chilled. I ran the rest of the stairs and at the top I paused, breathless and spent. Then I heard from Felicia's room a noise; a stealthy moving which I knew was not being done by any of the maids. I tiptoed toward it.

As I reached the opened doorway I saw the cupboard door close, gently, slowly. I thought of the cowardice in my line; that cowardice which I was certain had made "the tragic Belmonts'" tragedies. I set my teeth. I went to the cupboard. I flung it open.

It was empty of human being, but on the floor stood a small, square dais of ebony. On this was an ebony god with the most malicious grin I had ever seen on any god and before him was laid a blood-stained knife, a piece of leather that had in each end a hole that had been made by a nail, Ditridge's cap and a smoking bowl of incense.

I was smitten with terror and the sickness that it brings at one time. I sagged, shaking, against the door. Then I heard steps approaching.

I wrenched my eyes from the ghastly display; I turned, filled with a desperate resolve to escape.

Madness, in its most hideous form, menaced me through those footsteps. I did not wish to have a part of my raiment laid on that dais by one who worshipped the ebony gods of fixed stare, the gods of men who sacrifice to prove their piety.

THERE was a cretonne curtain tacked to a shelf on the other side of the room. Felicia's clothes were hung there. I knew now why, since the cupboard I had found was a temple.

I hurried across the room and hid myself among some dresses and there, rigid, I prayed that no tremor of curtain would deliver me into the strong, thin hands of Felicia; prayed that I might escape and live.

She came in. Some one was with her.

"Lock the door," I heard her whisper. I heard the rasp of a rusted key that turned in an old lock. "Look!" she ordered, her voice still deep and awed.

The cupboard door was evidently opened. I heard a squeak of hinge.

Then I heard, in Hale Stewart's voice: "Not bad for one night's work! You did your best! Remember that!" and a laugh that chilled me as no other laugh had ever chilled me. I heard him close the cupboard door.

There was a moment's silence. "What did you do?" he asked.

She answered, voice shaking: "What I could. You know I was out there at four; there wasn't much time! I couldn't get out earlier."

"Yet," said Hale Stewart, "it might have been done in a slower way."

"Yes," she agreed, with a sob.

"He bled to death?"

"Yes."

He said then: "Come here." She evidently went into his arms; a moment and I heard him question with, "You love me?"

I heard her loud, almost desperate "Yes!"

"We will finish things and go," he

said after a moment. "That Belmont girl must be gotten out of here without being harmed, if possible. Then we'll end things for the Honorable T. Barricault Stewart so that no one will ever know he did not die in sleep and of old age, a peaceful old age!" And he laughed again.

He caressed her then; I heard his murmured endearments and her equally passionate responses. He said, finally: "I must go. We can't risk this way. Kiss me, dearest! Dearest!"

HE WENT directly toward the door; I heard his swift movement. Before he opened it he said: "Don't forget to stop your boudoir clock. Remember you said it had stopped. The alien intends to help her 'dear employer!'"

And, in my burning heart, I echoed it! "I will," Felicia promised.

The door into the hall was opened, then closed. I heard Felicia lock it. Then she came directly toward me. I heard her coming.

She pushed aside the curtain and groped among the frocks. I closed my eyes to pray as I have never prayed. She was groping, and she was nearer—nearer! She touched my sleeve!

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. STEWART MAKES A REQUEST

HELD my breath; my rigidity was such that it made me shake. I closed my eyes as I sent up a petition. I knew then, as mortals do when confronted by death, how I wanted—longed to live!

Never had I known such strain as was in those long-drawn, pulsing seconds. They were years—years to me.

After her touch on my sleeve Felicia Stewart fumbled, groped among the frocks that were touching me. I heard, almost felt, her deep breathing.

Twice I heard her deep sobs. The hard beat of my own heart seemed louder to me than the strike of the stair clock. I felt she must discover me and then, after what I had heard and seen, after what I knew of her and of Hale—*what?*

But at last, when my repression had been so tested that I was choking back the scream that would force itself from me if she found me, she pulled some garment from a peg and, through the surge and pound of blood in my ears, I heard her moving around the room.

Yet, I knew that she did not open the closet-door. That had a rusty hinge which told of its opening.

AT LAST the room grew still and I gathered up the remnants of my depleted courage to push aside the curtains and to look out.

Things blurred before me at first, blurred and danced. I had never suffered so real nor deep a shock and it had left an imprint upon me physically, mentally. Gropingly, unsteadily, I hurried toward the door. Yet something prompted me to turn again toward that cupboard. Perhaps it was my feeling that I must have its secret firmly fixed in visual memory for the testimony that I planned to make against Felicia and Hale Stewart and for my employer and my friend, the man his son and daughter called "my dear employer."

Shaking, and after an entreating glance toward the door that led to hall and freedom, I opened the closet door. With it opened, surprise took my fear from me for a long, few startled seconds. The cupboard was empty.

The ebony dais, the ebony god, Ditridge's cap, the leather strap that had

been marked so horribly, the incense burner, the blood-stained dagger—all gone.

I could not even detect the floating aroma of the pungent, acrid, eastern incense. Looking, I swayed. Then, closing the door with a caution of which even Felicia might have been proud, I crept, trembling, from the room.

In my own room, I closed and locked all the doors and lay down with the hope that I could gather a little strength. I needed it!

A half-hour passed and with its passing I decided I must go downstairs. I realized I must not, with any divergence from the normal, incite suspicion. Instead I must treat Felicia as I had treated her; keep my fear hidden under a calm, if not smiling, exterior and watch.

Then, too, I wanted to see and to be with Mr. Stewart. I felt that he could bring me something of my lost sanity and, too, after that which I had heard, I did not want to leave him, a blind old man of waning strength, alone.

I FOUND Mr. Stewart before the long table upon which were set his favorites of the gods. He was fingering the biggest one, seeing it in his way, which was through his fingers. I had never seen so unhappy a look on a man's face as was on his.

"A man who fails to make and keep his family happy is a failure," he said. "You heard what my little Felicia said. Thus, you know how she and the rest feel." He could not go on from the shaking of his voice.

I disagreed and hotly. "Happiness cannot be put into a soul, it must be grown in a soul and by the owner of that soul!" I stated.

His face quivered. "Child," he answered, "you help me"; and he added: "I wish I could believe you."

I said, "You can!"

He smiled wanly and shook his head. And then he said: "Sit down, Anne, I want to talk with you about poor Ditridge and of why I believe he was murdered."

I settled on the edge of a straight chair, and Mr. Stewart told me his tale.

The owner of the shop from which the leather had come was an inflammable Pole. Ditridge, who had a sporting instinct, spent many a night in the Pole's cellar at that ancient sport which is known as "shooting craps."

The Pole had a mistress, and where there are women there is too often trouble, Mr. Stewart pointed out. Anyway, right or wrong, the Pole had become jealous, and had come to Mr. Stewart late the day before to complain of Ditridge's hanging around his place.

"I remember now," I said, "I wondered why he was here." And I almost added a piece of information about the call. Then, thinking that I could discover myself whether or not the man had pilfered anything, I decided I would not bother the already bothered Mr. Stewart.

The fact was that, late in the afternoon, I had found the man alone in the library and I had found him in the act of reaching deep into a drawer which held the most treasured specimens in Mr. Stewart's collection.

"He lets me see; I like heem!" he had said to me; and I, thinking this not an unlikely piece of Mr. Stewart's kindness, had not, at that moment, any doubt of the truth of the statement. I had not, in fact, attached to the caller or his statement any importance.

"So you saw him," said Mr. Stewart. "Well, he came and I told him I would do what I could. But Ditridge was over there again last night,

I am told, and this morning Scharwenka is gone—and Ditridge is gone, too."

"Not another murder?" I broke out—my voice shook from shock.

"No," Mr. Stewart answered, shaking his head; "Scharwenka has simply disappeared, and I imagine his disappearance will convict the poor devil of his crime."

He paused a moment, sighed deeply as if he were pathetically tired, and then went on: "The police agree with me about this, and that rather simplifies things. It would kill me to have my poor little Felicia dragged into this sort of affair."

My lips became a straight line. It was not yet time for me to speak and to keep silence was not easy.

"I want to tell you something else," Mr. Stewart continued, "and this is something that I would confide to very few people. But you, my dear, are my friend and I feel it, and I have grown to depend upon it."

"You can!" I answered warmly.

Again he drew a deep breath. "Scharwenka," he said, "is the Pole whom my daughter wanted to marry. Even now, seeing the depths to which he has descended so easily, and knowing what she must of his lacks, she does not forgive me."

"Everyone," I said, "is a little insane on some subject." (And how insane Felicia was, I dared not then consider.) "You know that," I added. "Remember it, and know that you did your best."

I paused then; I had to. The words were an echo of Hale Stewart's words of congratulations to Felicia on her "good night's work!" The echo filled me with fear and its companions, the appalling cold, the creeping skin, the dizziness.

"I have tried to live an upright and an honorable life," Mr. Stewart stated with a little pride that was, I thought, considering his life, pardonable.

TWO more upsetting things happened during the course of that day which divided me from that dreadful night. The first was Mr. Stewart's request that I should bring my grandfather's collection of gods to his house and his shelves.

"I know," he said, "that you have given your grandfather your word to keep the collection. That I will respect, although I covet the collection. But why it should not be here, where it would be safer than in storage, I cannot see. Would you be willing, child?"

Without knowing why, I was *not* willing.

My grandfather had implied, through his making his collection the subject of his last message, a desire that I guard them carefully. I even felt that my grandfather had wanted me to secrete them.

"I'd have to consider that, Mr. Stewart," I said. I saw his disappointment and his hurt.

"I would be very careful of them," he promised wistfully. "I suppose you can't understand, but I simply want to have them in my hands. I grope my way down here often at night when I can't sleep, to sit here and run my seeing fingers over my little friends. Your grandfather had some fine specimens and like nothing that I own."

I have never felt so mean as I did then. But I said only, "I'll think it over, Mr. Stewart."

"Do please," he begged, "and know that they would be cherished here as they would be nowhere else, and that I would get from the collection more than could anyone else! Even though it was only borrowed!"

"Yes, I know," I said; and I did know that, of course; one has to grow

a love for such things to enjoy them at all.

Suddenly I wondered, and it chilled me, whether Mr. Stewart's wish for my grandfather's gods had made him employ me, and whether the mania went so far that the collector would do anything in order to collect?

It was not a pleasant thought. It made me, for a second, question even Mr. Stewart. And how I needed someone, in that dark house of horror, in whom I might believe!

"Think it over," he advised, "but don't let it worry you. Whatever I do, a harmless, old blind man, who is your friend, need never worry you."

Well I knew that, and I said so, warmly. Then he confided a little more in me, and his confidence did not decrease my terror. I did not want Felicia to have any real reason for dislike of me, when the mere thought of her dislike made me turn pale!

"Anne," said Mr. Stewart, as I finished reading him a catalogue from which he had selected several items he meant to examine, perhaps to buy, "Anne, I think I'd better tell you something and frankly: my—my women folk, although well-provided for, are, I'm afraid, a wee bit greedy. At least it seems so, for when I told them, yesterday, that I planned to leave you, through my will, a little trifle in the way of a few bonds, they protested.

"This bequest won't shorten them, yet they don't like it. For that reason I'm afraid they are trying to do what would be known, I believe, as 'freezing you out.' You won't"—his voice threatened to fail him—"you won't leave me alone again, Anne?" he questioned.

I SAID, loudly, loyally, that I would not. But I advised him to let the matter of the bequest be erased from his plans.

"You are kind and good to me, Mr. Stewart," I said. "I shall always remember your kindness, and that will be enough!"

I stood up as I spoke. I had finished my reading aloud and my morning's work and I wanted to take a turn in the bleak garden before I must meet the ordeal of lunching with the Stewarts and sitting in the same room with Felicia, who had done "a good night's work."

I wanted, outside, to settle the matter of what to do and whom to approach. Something must be done and soon, I knew, if further atrocity were to be avoided.

My mind was not clear. The police had already settled the crime upon the Pole named Scharwenka. I could imagine Felicia, in her calm, frigid way, convicting me of insanity. I knew Hale was her ally, and that they planned to put Mr. Stewart out of the way in such a manner that no one would guess he had not "died of a peaceful, old age in his sleep."

As I stood up Mr. Stewart rose. "Anne," he said, "I'm a foolish old man, and I think I would not have the courage to live in this house if you were not in it. Age brings its weaknesses. 'Vapours,' I think Miss Austen called them. I have"—he tried to smile—"a good many 'vapours' lately, I find. I can't bear to think of your leaving."

"I had not spoken of leaving," I said.

"I feared you had thought of it," he whispered. "I feared that that, which might seem unkindness from anyone who did not—who did not—understand my family might lead you to want to leave."

"I'll stay," I promised. He reached for my hand to hold it for a minute between his and to pat it. "I can't tell you how much better I feel, child," he confided. "I can't tell you at all of the relief your words give to me!"

CHAPTER IX

THE CAT FOLLOWS DITRIDGE

A GARDEN in November is unbeautiful at best, and the garden of The Shadows was at its worst all the year. That I could see, by the indulged dilapidation which had made my first impression of The Shadows.

Now, stark ruin confronted me from every corner as I paced the absurdly curved paths which had been built to follow a Victorian fancy. Erratically leaning stalks sometimes made me step from the path and upon the rank, drying, browning grass, which covered the soggy ground.

Here and there a bolder Fall growth held to its green, but as the general rule death stalked in that dreary garden. And suitably, I thought!

I walked methodically, head bent, mind given wholly to my problem. The wind, a temperamental affair which lulled only to rise afresh and with a more intense fury, buffeted my skirts, blew my hair in my eyes and around my face; ripped the last yellow leaves from the trees to send them to earth, or lifted them from earth in far wandering, spiral coils.

Clouds scudded across the lead gray of the sky. I remembered Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights," which had so fascinated and terrified me as a child. The low-spirited menacing day seemed to have stepped from that book, which is so penetrated with nameless horror.

It was a day that had a shiver in it, even when the voyager stood to the leeward; a dramatically dark day, the sort that proves the need of every house for an open fireplace. I shivered again and again, though not from physical cold, as I paced that wasted area.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" was my question, and it became the voice of the wind in the madly, angrily tossing pines.

SUDDENLY my answer came. It all seemed clear. And this is what I decided.

I needed more time in which to make up my mind as to what action I would bring against the demoniac Felicia Stewart, and Hale Stewart, her supporter in almost unthinkable crime. I needed more hours for observation. And I would use them.

I would discover what I could alone and without help. I would thus, perhaps, be of real service to Mr. Stewart and to the world, and I would, at the same time, prove to myself that there was no taint in my soul of the family cowardice; that taint which had led too many of my surname to evade.

My grandfather had not liked my father's wife; he had done his effectual best to put her from his life and from the life of my father. My father and my mother had found life too bitter a dose for them and they had pushed the spoon away.

Well, in spite of my inheritance I would not turn, I vowed. Here was my test and I would meet it.

Walking against the wind which made my eyes sting and my cheeks glow—cheeks that had been pale—I resolved I would work that night. And I would see that Mr. Stewart was safe that night through a ruse that I felt would be effective.

I would say, "Mr. Stewart, I will have my grandfather's collection brought here and set on your shelves tomorrow if tonight you will go to the Army and Navy Club to sleep."

I knew he would consent and I knew that he was enough a mystic to grant to others the right to mys-

ticize without a following explanation. Thus he would be safe.

In the morning, if I were still active, I would get in touch with Tony Steele to tell him of all I hoped to discover and of the whole affair. Tony had a hard, sound, level head, and he would believe me to be sane, which would be more than would many others to whom I could tell my tale. And I would follow his advice.

This seemed simple and easy to do as I strode the wasted garden that pale gray noon.

I HAD turned toward the summer-house abruptly, having been directed, by aimlessly wandering feet alone, toward the garage. When I found myself close to it, I shuddered and quickened my pace in another direction. I passed a man who was clipping the deadwood from a sprawling bush. He gave to the scene a homely, reassuring touch for a moment. Then my heart sank.

The worker's soft hat was pulled low and a fringe of unkempt red hair was revealed at the back of his neck —and Harkins' hair is sleek and black. But Harkins has, on his right wrist, a gaudily tattooed anchor. I had looked at it often and with the greatest admiration, when I was a child.

My grandfather, a seafarer, had liked it, while he laughed at it and at Harkins' preference for rather noticeably long sleeves. Now I saw an anchor on the right wrist of the clipper of the bushes: exactly such an anchor as is on Harkins' right wrist.

I blinked and looked again, but the man had dropped his arms; he was stooping to cut the low branches. His wrist was covered. I hesitated a moment and then I went on.

If it were Harkins, and Harkins was, as Mr. Stewart suspected, playing some underhand game, my part in the game would be easier if he did not know that I had recognized him.

I was a good deal perturbed by this last development. I remembered Harkins' look that had come when I promised my grandfather I would keep the small gods; and Harkins' hate of Alice, and of how he and Agnes had quarreled after years of faithful, harmonious service together.

Something had disrupted the quiet in the servants' quarters of my old home. I remembered how my grandfather had said, when some of the troubles had drifted to the front of the house for our adjustment, "Everyone in the regiment seems out of step but Harkins!" And it had seemed so!

EYES fixed on the path I paced, I did not realize I was at the edge of the once glorious, now absurd and decaying, summer-house until I saw the step that would take me to the rotted, leaf-strewn floor. I raised my head and as I did I started violently.

A cat, and a poor thing it had been, was hanging from a piece of the jigsaw scrollwork arches that were between each of the divisions that made the place octagonal. It had been suspended by a limp, soiled piece of ribbon that had once, perhaps, been a proud bow.

The poor beast's mouth was open; its tongue was out and the eyes were wide and glazed. I stared, angered to the utmost by the exhibition of such cruelty and sickened by the picture. Then my eyes dropped. On the seat that ran around the inside of the summer-house, and just below the cat, was one of the eternal gods.

Call me a fool, if you will. But I backed away from the place and as I backed I heard again, and as if the wind whispered it, a low, weak, lin-

gering wail, "Miss Anne! Miss Anne!"

Where did it come from? How could I know? I heard it as clearly as one would hear the voice of a faint radio.

Forgetful of the first fright, I paused to listen. But it was gone. Then, turning, I saw a bent figure coming toward me on the path and, heart still beating hard and in the uncertain, hard-plunge, full-stop way which comes from shock, I waited.

IT WAS Greenly, I found after a minute. A toothless old man with a skin that made one think of a dried apple; lines ran from his thin, bloodless lips, which seemed puckered on a gathering-string.

"Howdy," he cackled in the shrill, high voice of the deaf.

I answered him with a "Good morning!"

"Be you that Miss Belmont?" he questioned next. I said, "Yes."

"How?" he questioned. I repeated my "Yes," and I added a nod to it.

"Thought so!" he said, and with a satisfaction that would have been amusing at any other time.

I drew close to him to shout my question. "What does that mean?" I asked, pointing to the cat.

"That?" he echoed. Then he looked over his shoulder and toward the man who was trimming the bushes, toward the man with an anchor tattooed on his right wrist.

"Always fightin', them cats," he said in a harsh whisper, "and that there new feller we got to trim them bushes, he says, 'I'll learn them cats to fight, I will!' and he caught this 'ere one, and he strung 'er up!"

He slapped his thigh and cackled a loud, thin laugh as he finished. I felt the color rise in my cheeks as my anger increased.

"If he does it again," I screamed, I'll have him arrested. Tell him so!"

"How?" he questioned, bafflement taking the place of his mirth.

I screamed my dictum again.

The old man said, "They're an awful pest, them cats, but I'll tell him."

I nodded shortly and turned away. I had only gone a foot or two when I turned, realizing I had forgotten something. And, turning, I met a new shock of the sort that perhaps only young and fairly pretty women understand. The old man was looking at me in a way that made me sick; looking at me in a horribly greedy, estimating way.

His eyes were narrow and bright and the sort of fixed smile that may, I imagine, go with a sort of unmentionable orgy was on his vicious face. His expression changed instantly.

I pointed to the small god. "Who put that there?" I questioned sternly.

"Oh, that *there?*" he questioned in turn.

I made no answer and he went on: "That new feller," he said, "he's kind of queer. Not right, I think mebbe, in the head. He carries it with him when he ain't usin' it like this. He says it works magic. I don't think he's so right, mebbe, in the head. He don't act so right in the head."

He had the maddening habit of repetition that often belongs to his class. And speaking as he did then, I would have given to him all my trust had I not turned too quickly, the moment gone, to see what I had seen.

THIS questioning done, I hurried from the summer-house. I decided I would hunt the new worker on my way to the house to tell him that if anything like that happened again I would have him jailed.

He would not need to know that I questioned his identity through such message and through my giving it and I could gain the chance for an

inspection of him to my satisfaction. But the new worker was nowhere to be found. Nowhere!

At my elbow Greenly spoke. He had come so quietly that I jumped at his voice and turned on him, furious.

"If you're lookin' for that there new man," he croaked in his shrill way, "he's gone. He don't eat here o' noons. He's gone. He goes to one of them there eatin' places on the pike. I don't know right which one he goes to, but he goes to one of them there eatin' houses on the pike and——"

I said a brittle, "That will do, Greenly, I fully understand."

"All right," he said, "all right, Miss, just so you do understand. You seemed to be lookin' for him and I thought——"

I hurried away while he was still explaining and into the house. I had a special mission there, a something that I hoped I might do, alone and uninterrupted.

CHAPTER X

FROM THE CELLAR WINDOW

HEN I went in luncheon had not yet been announced and the library, which held gods instead of books, was empty. I immediately went to the drawer in which were stowed the best of the collection, with the thought that I would discover whether or not the Pole, Scharwenka, had stolen any items on the day before.

I opened it to look through the contents. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, but I was shocked to see in the breast of one small idol a similar hole to that which had been in the idol who was my grandfather's companion at the time of his stroke.

It made me gasp, and the faintness I had learned too well returned to me. I had crouched back at first so absorbed in my physical upset that I did not know I was not alone.

After a minute or two I felt eyes, as one does, and I turned to see Alice staring at me as I had never seen her stare. She moistened her lips and then she smiled a distorted smile at me.

"Better for you," she said, "if——" Then she stopped.

I waited, brows knit. Suddenly she smiled naturally.

"Luncheon is served, Miss Anne," she announced in her old way, and she added, "I'm awful nervous, I guess, so please, Miss Anne, excuse me if I seemed funny, but I can't bear to think of anybody gettin' interested in them things because of your grandfather and all. And, anyway, I think them gods is funny, queer-like in the way they makes people act."

"That's nonsense, Alice," I said, but not quite certainly.

"I s'pose," she agreed, yet not as if convinced.

"The are only carved wood," I pointed out.

"Oh, I know!" she said, looking from shelf to shelf, "but it seems to me they're kinda queer. I wisht you'd get rid of yours, Miss Anne."

I shook my head.

"I was looking in this drawer," I explained after a little silence, "to see whether anything was gone. The contents, you know, are here—listed outside and yesterday I found that Pole Scharwenka's his name, isn't it?"

"Yes, Miss Anne."

"He was pawing through this drawer yesterday."

Alice's eyes grew hard and bright and when she spoke there was venom in her voice. I had not dreamed her to be capable of such violence. She hoped they, meaning the authorities, would get him and string him up. Ditridge, she said, had been "A nice

young gent'man, a perfec' gent'man," and he had "died awful!"

"And that murderer would be robbin' old Mr. Stewart of his gods, too, would he?" she ended.

"He didn't," I said; "everything seems to be here." And I looked toward the drawer in which was a god with a hole above its heart.

I wished I had not seen that and that I had not, through it, come upon a so gruesome an echo of my grandfather's last evening upon earth. So many strange sign-posts I had collected, and all pointing to roads I could not see for fog.

AT EVERY free interval, all the rest of that day, I tried to reach Tony Steele. My courage had evaporated and I had decided I had best get his opinion and, possibly, his help, before my second stretch of dark hours in The Shadows, but I could not find him in any of his usual haunts and at six, when Harkins spoke to me from Tony's house, to tell me that "Mr. Steele" was dining out, I gave it up. There was nothing else, of course, to do.

Just before dinner was announced I told Mr. Stewart of the bargain he could make with me in order to get my grandfather's collection of idols, and he agreed with a smile.

"It is amusing, my dear," he said, "but if you want me to sleep in town, that is enough! Yours to command!"

And I told him he was a darling and, his arm through mine, we went in to dinner.

Here I found Felicia and Hale Stewart in their role of brother and sister; calm in each other's presence, detached. Their attitude offered the utmost in contrast to their mood of that morning; the mood I had understood too well from the words I had, unwillingly, overheard. It was difficult for me to keep from watching them.

Half-way through the meal Mr. Stewart said, "I am going to spend the night in town, so, Felicia, if you want to play the "Funeral March" tonight, it won't trouble me—nor anyone, I think."

She grew pale and she flashed him that look of hers that I had learned: the look that held such hatred as told of a wish to do violent murder. Then she looked at me.

"I've locked the piano and I've thrown the key down the well," she said; "whoever goes after it, and whoever finds it, may play."

It wasn't a pretty moment! Nor was it a pleasant exhibition! I saw the trembling of Miss Janette's hand; I saw Hale Stewart shake his head at Felicia, and I saw a little muscle at the corner of Mr. Stewart's lip quiver.

Why, I wondered, didn't he live by himself and be done with the accepting of insults? I knew there was plenty of money; everything told of that, in spite of the disrepair of the place.

But still—he stayed to suffer. Perhaps the spirit of the old and the most conservative Philadelphia kept him tied; the wish to avert scandal and to avoid gossip.

There had been a strained lull. Felicia said suddenly, "I'm glad I did that! I would do it again!"

Mr. Stewart spoke quietly. "Felicia," he said, "I wish you would remember what happens when you work yourself up so."

I imagined her in screaming hysterics. Evidently she, too, dreaded these attacks, whatever they were, for she shrank back and she seemed to shrink into herself; she grew smaller, leaner and oh, so pale.

"If you try, you know you can control yourself," said Mr. Stewart, "and avoid it all! Won't you try, dear?"

Saying she would was difficult for her; I saw her struggle. Mr. Stew-

art appended to his petition a soft "Please, dear!" Then, grudgingly, roughly, too loudly, she said "Yes!"

I saw Alice, who was passing a vegetable, bite her lips. She evidently so hated Felicia that she was pleased by Felicia's being humiliated, and although I could not help but pity so mad and perverse a creature as was Felicia Stewart, could I neither quite blame Alice for her feeling.

AT EIGHT I saw Mr. Stewart off for town with Hale as his chauffeur; a substitution so reminiscent of tragedy that I shuddered to see it.

After the motor had turned from the drive and into the main highway, I decided I would walk a bit outside. It was a relief to be under the stars and away from the house.

My fear, which had increased as the dusk came, almost dropped away as I breathed in the stimulating air of that autumn evening.

I paused on the terrace to watch the motors passing below. The lights from them seemed yellow antennæ and there was a reassurance for me in the feeling that so much of the world was steadily speeding past and almost within hail. A moment, and I turned to the right of The Shadows, for, even in my braver mood, I wished no contact with the summer-house.

To the right of the house I found the drive that took one out, after a circling of The Shadows, and here I saw a car that made me pause. It was Tony Steele's roadster and someone was in it, and after I had crossed the grass silently, I found Tony!

"Tony!" I said loudly.

"Bless your pretty heart, Alice," he said, "it's taken you a little while to reach your impatient lover!"

And then I stepped into the light. For a moment Tony was quiet. Then he laughed.

"I have put my foot in it, haven't I, Anne?" he questioned. I made no answer. He opened his car door to step from his car and to stand by me, looking down.

"It all looks pretty rotten, Anne," he said, "but I think you're going to understand."

"I have for a long time, Tony," I responded, a good deal more bitterness and hurt in my voice than I cared to show.

"My dear," he said; a protest in two short words and an appeal, too. I stood stiffly, heart hardening and aching. I could not at that moment have spoken.

Suddenly Tony grew loud and almost angry. "Anne," he demanded, "how long do you think a man hangs around as the plaything of a girl who doesn't care and who admits she'll never marry him? I'll say he won't hang around more than just so long if he has any spirit. And Alice is a lovely creature. You'll admit that? And she is good company, too. I'm growing rather fond of Alice. Rather fond of her!"

"You'd never marry her," I protested hotly, "and I thought—I thought, Tony—that this sort of thing was beneath you!"

"Really?" he questioned and in so light a manner that he made his query an insult. Head suddenly high, I turned away. I was through! I decided. Through, at least, with any social contact with Anthony Steele; and, if I could be, through with the thoughts of him which had so dominated my days.

"You know," he called after me, "I may not marry her. In that you are right, for she may not have me!"

Cheeks flaming, I turned toward the front of the house. I could not, even then, believe it was Tony Steele who had spoken. I had known him long and well, and never before had anything in his conduct given to me an inkling of this cad who had so

frankly made, with words, a chart of himself.

As I neared the long, narrow porch, I heard Alice's laugh and my cheeks grew even warmer. Had she heard that which Tony had said? It was possible, even likely. I stopped, breathing hard; angrier, I think, than I had ever been, and hideously jealous.

AS TONY'S motor purred, I realized with a hard, downward plunge of heart that there was no one to help me, if I needed help, that night.

Well, I decided, with a courage that grew of my anger, I would pass the hours without the feeling of an ally within hailing distance. What happened to me would not so much matter anyway—now. And so stood out the "tragic Belmont" strain, and I knew my weakness and I did not then care.

It was hard to wish for life, to regret leaving life, when I knew, from the pain that was in me—a fire—how I loved Tony Steele in spite of everything!

In the shadows at the corner of the house, I waited. Tony's car, in which I had driven with him so often, came toward me and went by. I heard Alice's shrill, high giggle and the sound of Tony's voice.

Then, my throat cramped and my anger slipped away into despair, and I turned. The faintest of lights made me look down at the cellar window which had been behind me. I jumped, cringed, and, swaying, I slunk back, eyes fixed on that which was a magnet for them, which hypnotized me.

Two emaciated, ivory-white hands gripped the iron rods that guarded the window. In the dusk and by the faint light in the cellar, I could make out the leanness of those fingers and the unnatural bleached look of them.

And silhouetted against the faint light was a head, matted unkempt hair standing up, growing wild. I heard hard breathing and I screamed, "Tony! Tony!" But only the moaning wind in the pines answered me.

Trembling, I moved, but not quickly enough. A long stick with a hook on it had been poked between the rods. The hook was fastened to my skirt. and, in spite of pallor and starvation, what strength! What awful strength! I felt myself being drawn, closer and closer, to that cellar window.

CHAPTER XI

A MESSAGE FROM BELOW

FROM the drive, which led from the main road, I heard someone whistling the "Funeral March." The stick dropped; it hung slack from the hook which had been so firmly caught in my dress. Released, I stood shaking, unable for a moment to move. Then, sobbing, I ran toward the front of the house; up the steep porch steps and I was in the hall!

I sagged against a table, utterly spent. My eyes searched each shadow of the faintly lit space. So many of them, and each seeming to menace me!

From below I heard a whimper, a half groan, that I now knew came from the lips of the pale relic of something that had, perhaps, once been as strong and fearless as I had been before I stepped into The Shadows.

The memory of the matted hair, the pallor and the hands gripped around iron rods, these followed me, terrified me! I could not free myself from the gruesome silhouette any more than can one be rid of the blare of a too glaring electric light which echoes when eyes are closed.

After a moment, I turned, trembling, toward the drawing-room and

there in a deep chair that faced each door and window I settled.

Some flattering male, I remembered, had once told me that one's penchant for corners in restaurants and public places came from an atavism, a throw-back to that time when all women were chased. I had thought it an amusing conceit at the moment. I now saw it as hideous. This fear of each window and door, each entrance a part of daily life? I knew nothing could be worse.

Shrunk in that deep chair, I felt my heart beats quicken as I heard a step; my palms grew damp as I waited. But a moment and I could breathe, for it was only Felicia after all and, though I feared her, she was better to me than that thing which I had met a little earlier. She turned into the drawing-room quickly to go directly toward the piano.

On this was set a Vishnu with emerald eyes. She tapped on its bosom; once, again, and yet again.

I looked on with amaze and a return of my full measure of terror. Her raps were loud; she seemed to listen between each. I found myself to be moistening my dry lips. Her gesture was, to me, almost as bad as had been the silhouette of the faintly lit cellar.

I cowered even more in my chair. I hoped, I prayed—she would not see me, but she turned and I was caught. She started, frowned and then, with an evident recourse to will power, erased the frown to smile.

"Oh," she murmured, "I didn't know you were here. I thought you had gone up."

"I was outside," I stammered, "and then I came in." Mixed, it was, and no wonder! The wonder was I could speak at all!

"You're quite welcome to any room here while you stay," she answered me, smiling as she said "while you stay."

I think I said a drab "Thank you," but I'm not quite sure.

"You saw me tapping on the idol?" she questioned lightly.

I nodded.

"Funny thing, one's little superstitions, aren't they?" she questioned, still lightly, as she sat down in a chair that faced mine. "You know, all rapping on wood comes from that ancient practice of knocking upon the breasts of the gods before making a prayer, so as to command their attention. And I suppose it seems very absurd, but when I rap wood I do it properly!"

IT WAS an elaborate explanation and perhaps true, but I did not believe it! Something deeper had been meant by Felicia as she rapped so loudly on the breast of the ebony idol. I was certain of it! And I was as certain that she waited, as she paused between each tap, for some answering signal.

I thought of Alice's hope that I might rid myself of my grandfather's collection. And I shuddered, for now I wanted to be rid of it, and done with such gods forever!

"I'm glad I happened upon you," said Felicia, "you are really the very person I wanted most to see. What was that?" she ended abruptly, stridently.

I had heard, from somewhere, three slowly rapped taps.

I said, "Perhaps the wind blowing the trumpet vine that grows against the house. I noticed it scraping last night."

"It sounded to me as if someone had tapped," she stated, as she gave me a searching glance which easily read, "How much do you know? How much do you suspect? Do you connect my message and this message? If you do——"

"Doubtless it was that," she said, after her study of me, and she said it easily.

My face must have been a better masquerader than my heart! That had never before beat so hard for so long! Nor so unsteadily!

"Those vines should be trimmed," she went on, "but it is so difficult to get helpers of any sort, and that takes me to the subject that I feel I must mention, even while I dislike doing it. But I'm sure you'll understand."

"I shall try to," I promised and with a double entendre which, in a strange way, helped me, stiffened me; "I believe in trying to understand everything—everyone."

"Quite right," she agreed, matching her slender fingers together, studying them; her long face bent above her hands so that it seemed even longer than it was—more hollow of cheek, older, wearier.

Whatever vows she had vowed herself to had not been fulfilled easily, I saw. She was a wreck. A worn, thin woman who should, at moments, still have seemed a girl.

There was a fineness in her, too, that I felt deeply at that moment as I studied her; raven hair, a shadow above her high forehead, lips drooping, sombre eyes accented by a purple blotch.

"It's really a predicament," she admitted, taking up her conversational thread once more, "but I'm sure you will help me. I know you know something of the difficulty of keeping house and worse, keeping servants, and you can imagine how hard it is to keep them content here—so far from the necessary motion pictures, dance halls——"

She paused; I waited.

"My servants," she announced bluntly, "threaten to leave unless—forgive my frankness, please—you do. A woman, they say, makes too much extra trouble."

"I have not been discharged by Mr. Stewart," I answered coldly.

She raised her slender shoulders, her finely arched, black eyebrows.

Then, in the awkward pause which ensued, she glanced toward the piano.

"I had forgotten that your mother," she said with a sneer, "was a London Music Hall performer, when I threw the key of the piano down the well. Doubtless you inherit your love of high-class music and your craving for such exalted expression from her."

ONCE more my cheeks flamed, but I made no answer. My mother had played in the cheapest of houses; my father had met her thus in Vienna. But Felicia's taunt was not the thing which angered me most. It was her descent to the use of any weapon by which she might be rid of me that started my ire.

It was so apart, her attitude, from the tradition that should have been hers and the courtly country gentleman mould that was her father's. He would not stoop below his world, I felt, even though he needed to badly. But his daughter!

I wanted to say, "There is no way to be rid of me, unless I wish to go!" I felt it, meant it. For, in spite of everything, I did not wish to go.

I was going to see it through; and I was more than ever resolved, sitting there facing a dangerous and an openly declared enemy, to stay until it was finished, this drama of blood and the return to old forms of worship. And so, with staying, to uncover the morbid and the hideous and the actually frightful.

Felicia Stewart spoke suddenly and as she did she again sneered at me. "You are a fool," she said.

I got up to move toward the door. At the door, I paused to look back at her. She was again by the piano and before the god. Waiting, I suppose, until I left her, so that she might tap again; slowly, prayerfully, attentively.

Our eyes met and clung. She was

the first to look away. I hurried through the hallway and toward Mr. Stewart's workroom.

THERE was an intangible, but a very unpleasant feeling in the sanctum of the gods. I switched on all the lights; I closed the door after me; I locked it. Then I went toward the long table, in a drawer of which I knew was a revolver. The drawer was locked.

I bit my lips as my terror-charged heart started a wild thudding. Somehow, I knew I must get that revolver.

I looked the table over carefully. I might, I realized, through the drawer above it, gain access to the one which held my only form of protection. They were shallow drawers and there were two. I took out the one that was above. A thin layer of wood between the two drawers, I saw with an increase of fright, was a part of the too solidly built table.

Suddenly I realized, looking at the drawer that I had taken out, and set on the table, that it was not as deep as was the table. I reached back and into the recess which I knew must be behind it. And I was not surprised when my groping hand told me that I had found another of the favorite occupants to whom the room had been given.

I drew it out. For a moment I looked at it and then it clattered to the floor as I, sick and reeling, lost strength to grip. The small idol was the one that my father had thought held his luck, and all his happiness. The one that had disappeared so mysteriously on the night when he had killed himself.

HOW LONG I stood there I do not know. I do know that when I was first aware of position in any keen, half normal way, my attention was attracted to the widely opening fireplace by a scratching, fumbling sound. I turned to it.

Through the grating, which was placed to let ash sift to the cellar, I saw fingers poking up; whitened, no—yellowed, emaciated fingers; those I had seen before.

Between these was a slip of paper which had been torn roughly from the edge of a newspaper. Trembling so that I could scarcely walk, I crossed the room.

I hesitated as I neared the fireplace. It did not seem as if I could stoop to take from that wasted and hideously bony, sick-looking hand, the message, if it were such.

As I hesitated I heard a hoarse, "Friend?" and the inflection made it a question.

I answered with, "Friend!" Then I stooped.

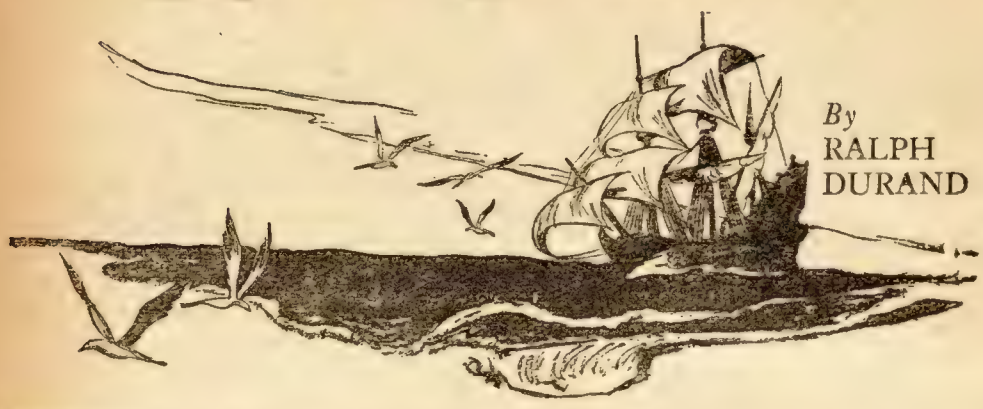
Between the gratings I saw a glint that I knew came from maddened eyes. Again I heard the harsh, hard breathing. I took the paper. I stood, swaying, too sick to read for the second; sight gone.

Then I turned questioning face toward the electric light switches beside the door that led into the hall. The two lights by the mantel had gone out. No one was in the room, no one that I could see.

I waited, tense, breathless and in a second and every light was gone. I was in the dark and something—someone—was moving toward me.

(To be concluded.)

A Tough Crowd



By
RALPH
DURAND

THE S. S. *Surabaya* belonged to a Chinaman. It was her business to tramp the East Indian Archipelago collecting cargoes of sharks' fin, birds' nest, dried sea-slug and other curious Oriental food-stuff and to carry them to San Francisco for ultimate sale to Californian chop-suey dives.

Because London was her Port of Registry she was nominally subject to the Board of Trade, but her business seldom took her within reach of a British Consul, and even when it did so her piebald crew of deck-hands and firemen, hailing from anywhere between Suez and the Golden Gates, did not know that British Consuls had authority to redress their grievances or indeed that they had grievances to redress.

This immunity from official interference was a constant source of satisfaction to the *Surabaya's* white officers who frequently boasted that they were the toughest crowd of hard-bitten slavedrivers in all the Eastern seas from Tan Jon Priok to Manila.

Their methods of enforcing discipline, according to their own account of themselves, were not such as are approved by the British Board of Trade Regulations, which do not sanction the use, as an instrument of punishment, of a short length of wire rope frayed at the end—a weapon that the *Surabaya's* white officers warmly recommended as inflicting the maximum amount of punishment with the minimum risk of broken bones.

Perhaps they were not quite such brutes as they professed to be, but it certainly was true that they could swear in even more languages than a Swiss hotel-porter can be polite in.

Many seamen would have envied them on other grounds besides freedom from the Board of Trade's grandmotherly fussiness. They never battled through mid-Atlantic winter gales or saw the forecastle sheeted with ice, for the *Surabaya's* round lay entirely within warm latitudes and for the greater part of the year she steamed among scented islands that looked like emeralds set in amethyst.

But the East Indian Archipelago has other characteristics besides warmth and color. Many of its smells, for example, should be described not as scents but as stinks. For this among other reasons the *Surabaya's* officers were homesick for the gray skies of Wapping or the Clyde.

THE SHIP was lying alongside a ramshackle wharf at Batuputih Laut, filling what was left of her cargo space with sago, and the afterguard were congratulating themselves that their next port would be one where, prohibition notwithstanding, they would be able to get white-men's drinks.

It was noon. The heavy air moved sluggishly. Sometimes it blew off a mangrove-swamp — mangrove-m u d smells like a tanner's yard turned rancid. Sometimes it blew from the pearling luggers anchored in the bay —rotting pearl-shell smells like a Billingsgate fish-market multiplied by ten.

Sometimes it wafted a smell of the food that the crew were eating on the forehatch—any attempt to describe the smell of the pickled fish with which Malays flavor their rice would be useless, for those who have once smelt it never forget it and those who have never smelt it would not believe even the most restrained report on it.

Mingled with all these odors, diversified by occasional whiffs of hot-lubricating oil from the engine-room, the aroma of pineapples and mangoes that the white officers were eating under the shade of the poop-awning had a curious streaky effect.

A tall, gaunt, chocolate-colored man in a striped cotton shirt and blue dungaree trousers stood on the wharf timidly trying to attract the attention of someone on the ship. As no one took any notice of him he climbed on board and stood at the foot of the poop-ladder humbly waiting for permission to approach the group of white men.

"There's some sort of nigger—an Islander I think—looks as if he wants to speak to you, sir," said the second mate.

The captain scorned to turn his head to look at any such blot on the earth's surface.

"Go and ask him his business," he growled, "and if he hasn't got any show him the way to the wharf with the toe of your boot."

The South Sea Islander began to mount the poop-ladder but drew back at the sight of a raised fist.

"Mogaheilo!" growled the second mate. He did not know the meaning of the word, except that the crew frequently used it when abusing each other, but he had adopted it for the sake of its fine, mouth-filling sound. *"Mogaheilo!* What d'you want, eh?"

BEFORE the man could answer a fit of coughing racked and shook him. He clung to the ladder-railing while it lasted and when the paroxysm had passed leaned his head on his outstretched arms, moaning feebly. The second mate took from between his emaciated fingers a thumb-marked envelope addressed to "El Senhor Capitano Steemer Surabaya" and carried it to the captain, who grunted contemptuously as he opened the letter and read it aloud.

"Illustrissimo Senhor Capitano: The bearer wot bring this letter be much sick man. He dive 4 year for me. Now he not can dive. I hearing this A.M. you clearing soon for San Francisco. He come from Gilbert Islands. Therefore you going close by his home. Supposing you take him when coming to islands you to make signal then his people coming alongside your ship in small boat and take him ashore. Thank you very much indeed. He can pay that why when one tell me you going at San Francisco I giving him his wages. He much sick man frightened dying at this place and much wanting die at his home. Please you take him. Thank you much too much. So long ole chap. Vostro obbediente servente. Pedro Gomez."

"The fellow looks as if he's got diver's lung-disease," commented the mate.

"Well, what of it?" sneered the captain. "This isn't a missionary

hospital ship, is it? Tell him to go and tell that yellow-faced Dago, Mr. Pedro Blooming Gomez, that we don't go blackbirding round the Islands kidnapping Kanakas for pearl-diving, and that if we did we'd take 'em home again when we'd used 'em up instead of turning 'em loose on charity."

The second mate went back to the South Sea Islander.

"No go, uncle," he said. "You go up to the store and buy something for that cough of yours. That's the best thing you can do."

"Me pay," pleaded the invalid. "Me gota plenty money."

HIS fingers trembling with weakness and eagerness, he unknotted the corners of a bundle and showed a pile of silver coins and greasy notes of small value: Indian rupees, Dutch guelders, Portaguese 500 rei pieces, Chinese taels and Chilian dollars; perhaps five pounds worth of English money.

A movement of the sluggish air scattered some of the notes. The second mate chased them round the hatch coamings and restored them to their owner.

"You hide them somewhere or you'll be losing the run of them," he advised. "Plenty thief-man about—plenty Lally-loo—you savey?"

The Kanaka lingered.

"Me plenty frightened die this place," he pleaded. "Me want die my country. Supposing me die this place me no savey find way to heaven belongah my people."

The mate might have listened but suddenly he saw that some of the crew were watching him, might even perhaps have seen him demean himself by chasing the Kanaka's paper money.

The thought that anyone should detect him in an act of kindness toward a man lower in the social scale even than a Malay was intolerable. If they had seen it, his reputation as a hard-case nigger-driver would be gone. If his fellow-officers had seen it he would be guyed all along the *praya*.

To regain what he could of his self-respect he went forward to turn the crew to work again, roaring at them so fiercely that they scrambled to the safe side of the winch like monkeys. The South Sea Islander, seeing no hope, climbed back to the wharf and shuffled dejectedly away through the dust of the glaring, refuse-littered street.

THE *Surabaya* cleared from Batuputih Laut that night and when the stars paled next morning was chugging eastward at a steady, coal-saving pace over a glass-smooth sea. Her captain, barefooted, his pyjamas rolled to his knees, his chest bared to the warm breeze, the stub of a manilla cheroot in his mouth, mounted the bridge and looked around him.

On the port bow the palms of a low-lying islet stood black against the splendor of the dawn. Above them the sky flamed with all the colors of the jeweled gates of Paradise. To starboard and astern the horizon was girdled with a belt of living opal.

Except for a Malay seaman, nodding at the wheel, no one was conning the ship. The crew were swabbing decks and on the afterhatch the second mate and the engineers, stripped to the buff, were skylarking together as the Samoan boatswain turned the hose on them. Faintly off the land came a hot-house scent of flowers.

The captain yawned, stretched, and relit the stub of his cheroot.

"Steward," he bawled, "where's the coffee?"

The Chinese steward came running with coffee-pot and cups. The captain pulled a banana from a bunch that hung from a stanchion and peeled it.

"Where's the mate?" he asked. "Tell him coffee's ready."

"Mister Mate in foccussil," answered the Chinaman.

"Eh! What's he doing in the fo'c'sle?" demanded the Captain.

It was no part of the steward's duty to know the reason for anything that the mate chose to do, but the question was a natural one. The forecastle was so thickly populated with cockroaches that the native crew to whom it by custom belonged used it only for the storage of their dunnage, preferring to sleep on the fore-hatch in fine weather and in the alleyway when it rained.

"Mister Mate go follard just now," answered the Chinaman blandly. "Hear um noise in foccussil. Go below look see."

Just then the mate's red head and redder hands appeared above the forecastle scuttle. He swung himself up to the deck with one heave and, turning, shouted down the hatch a volley of abuse in Chinese, Malay, Arabic and very plain English.

Then more slowly appeared a frizzy gray head followed by the lank body of the South Sea Islander who was afraid to die at Batuputih Laut. The mate grasped him by the scruff of the neck and propelled him vigorously aft to the foot of the bridge-ladder.

"What price this, sir!" he cried indignantly. "A blasted stowaway! I happened to go forrad just now, heard a row in the fo'c'sle like a fowl-house gone crazy and found it was this fellow coughing. It's the sick Kanaka who wanted to pay his passage to the islands."

BY THIS time the second mate and the engineers had come up to the bridge for their morning coffee.

"Drop the swine overboard, sir," suggested the second mate, anxious to live down the shame of his momentary lapse into sentimentality.

"If you'd shown him off the ship with your boot as I told you to do," growled the captain, "instead of behaving as polite as if it was your best girl come to see you, he wouldn't have been so anxious to come back again."

The sick Kanaka fumbled at the knots of his bundle.

"Me pay," he pleaded earnestly.

The captain snorted.

"I've a darned good mind to take your money," he said. "Then when we kick you ashore at Frisco you'd be farther from home than ever and no way of getting nearer to it. And Frisco's no place to be stranded on the beach, I don't mind telling you."

"Shall I put him to wash paint, sir," suggested the mate.

"Ah! And he'd like to do it, I dare say. A nice soft job that would just put in time nicely between meals. I'll make you a present of him, Mac. Time you've finished with him he'll know better than to take liberties with fellows like us."

The chief engineer grinned and nodded to his subordinate.

"Set him to work trimming in Number Two bunker," he said.

"And if you kill him," added the mate, "we can use him for shark bait."

THE KANAKA was hustled below, but eight bells had scarcely struck before he appeared on deck again, carried on the broad shoulders of an Arab stoker. The Arab laid him gently on the deck while his mate, a wiry little Jap, sluiced his head and chest with water. The second engineer watched the operation till the Islander showed signs of returning consciousness, then went and found the mate.

"That Kanaka is no earthly use to us," he said savagely. "If he's put to trimming, the coal dust makes him cough himself inside-out and if he's

put to stoking he faints with the heat."

"Faints, does he?" said the mate savagely. "I'll make him faint. What you call fainting I call skrimshanking."

He beckoned to the boatswain. "Here, Samoa. I'll give that fellow half an hour to get cool. After that find him a chipping-hammer and set him to work chipping the deck-plates abaft the main hatch ready for tarring down. And look see! If I find him idling he'll think a typhoon has burst atop of him. I'll grease myself and jump straight down his throat, by the Lord Harry, I will!"

"I think he's sick," said the boatswain compassionately.

"Sick!" growled the mate as he turned away to go to his breakfast. "So am I sick."

When the mate returned to the deck and walked round the ship to see that all hands were doing their duty he found no excuse for accusing the Kanaka of idling. The flakes of rust were flying from the poor wretch's hammer so freely that he had to stand back lest one should hit him in the eye.

But soon a fit of coughing racked him and when it passed he sat limp, his head on his crossed arms, panting feebly, and it was with a groan of pain that he picked up his hammer again.

"Stop that, you," said the mate brusquely. "Go along to the steward and ask him to give you some dishes to wash. And see here! If you catch sight of the old man, hide. If he sees you taking it easy he'll kick the seat of your trousers through the crown of your hat."

IT WAS possible for the Islander to hide his body but it was impossible for him to smother his cough. When the captain came out of the chart-room to take the noon observation, he heard, somewhere in the waist of the ship, a noise like the cackling of many hens rising above the beat of the engines.

Going down to investigate, he passed along the alleyway, heavy with the smell of boiled salt pork and thick pea soup that the wisdom of the Board of Trade has decided is as suitable food for Mercantile Marine officers in the tropics as it is elsewhere, and in the hottest, darkest, steamiest part of the galley he found the Islander, sitting on an upturned bucket, polishing a metal soup-tureen.

"Steward!" bawled the captain.

The Chinaman appeared from behind the freshwater pump, smiling obsequiously.

"Who turned that fellow on to your job?"

Chinamen have one stock reply to any question that they do not wish to answer.

"No savey."

"You do your own work yourself or there'll be another dead Chinaman, P. D. Q. D'you savey that?"

"Savey plenty," said the steward imperturbably, taking the tureen from the Kanaka's hands.

"As for you," continued the captain, scowling at the sick man, "you get up on the for'c'sle head where the air's a bit fresher, and when you feel the cough coming on face the wind and do like this——" He gave a grotesque but vigorous imitation of deep-breathing exercises. "And come to me at four bells in the dog-watch. You savey dog-watch?"

"I unnerstan', sir," said the Kanaka feebly. "I stop two year Fiji copra schooner before I dive for pearl. I been Sydney, Cooktown, T'ursday Island, every place. I Tamana boy, sir. In my home——"

The captain grunted as if insulted by the mere suggestion that so important a person as himself should have any interest whatever in the life

history of a Kanaka. He turned on his heel, affecting not to hear the man's appeal: "I want to die at my home, sir."

AFTER he had finished his tea that evening the captain, instead of going back to the deck, remained in his seat at the table, staring gloomily at the smoke that slowly rose in spirals from his cigar till it reached a draught of upper air and was whirled through the open skylight.

He responded in disconcerting monosyllables to the second mate's attempts at conversation and, just as his subordinate was taking a third helping of jam, told him gruffly that four bells had struck and that it was time he was on watch. Even then the tactless young man did not realize that the captain wished to be alone, for he returned and put his head through the saloon door.

"That Kanaka is waiting outside, sir," he said. "He says that you told him to——"

"Blast the Kanaka!" said the captain so savagely that the second mate went to his duty without any further delay.

Alone at last, the captain opened the locker in which he kept his cigars and other private belongings and took out a cardboard carton that contained a bottle of *Robinson's Kureall Elixir* and a pamphlet of directions as to its use.

He hurriedly concealed the bottle behind his back when the steward came to clear away the tea-things but, confident that the Chinaman could not read English, turned his attention without subterfuge to the pamphlet.

From this it appeared that the manufacturers of the *Elixir* confidently recommended it as the most efficacious liniment known to medical science for cuts, bruises, burns, strain, inflammation, stiff-neck or housemaid's knees; and, further, that taken internally it was an infallible specific against chickenpox, colera, consumption, delirium tremens, dyspepsia, indigestion, measles, mumps, scarlet-fever, small-pox, snake-bite, toothache and typhoid fever.

"If it'll cure all that, it ought to fix an ordinary cough," said the captain to himself. "No harm in trying, anyway."

He went on deck with the bottle in his hand, but slipped it hurriedly into his pocket at sight of the lamp-trimmer coming aft with the side-lights.

On the bridge the two mates and the two engineers were standing in a group debating whether the dancing saloons of San Francisco have any real claim to be considered better than those of Hong Kong. The captain did not join them.

After a sour glance at the compass, he went apart and watched the stars leap out in the wake of the sunset's fire. Presently the engineers went aft and the mate to his cabin. The captain turned to the second mate.

"Your log written up to date?" he demanded.

"Er—not quite up to date, sir."

"Go into the chart-room and write it up then."

As soon as the second mate was out of sight the captain, after a quick glance round the deck, left the bridge and beckoned to the Kanaka to follow him behind an engine-room ventilator.

"Try a sup of this," he said, uncorking the bottle of *Elixir*.

The Kanaka drank, gasped, reeled and clutched at the ventilator for support. There may be doubt as to the efficacy of the *Kureall Elixir* but there can be none as to its potency, for its principal ingredients are alcohol and cayenne pepper.

"That's fine," gasped the Kanaka as a fiery glow tingled through his veins.

"Take the bottle along with you

and take a dose now and then. Rub some on your chest, too. Come to me for more when that's finished."

"You good fellow belongah me," said the Kanaka gratefully.

"You get away forrad," snarled the captain. "And if anyone asks you who gave you the physic, say it was the steward."

THE KANAKA went back to the forecastle head and made his bed for the night with an old plaited-grass sleeping mat given him by the Japanese stoker and a tattered piece of canvas stolen out of the sail locker on his behalf by the Samoan boatswain. But before he curled himself up for the night the mate mounted half-way up the forecastle ladder and tossed him a bundle that proved to be a snappy but thoroughly serviceable dreadnought overcoat.

"Here, you," said the mate. "It's got the moth in it."

The Kanaka had scarcely snuggled down before the chief engineer made him gather up his miscellaneous bedding, carry it to the engine-room, and spread it on the grating above the cylinder covers.

"You camp there," he said. "Plenty warm, plenty fresh air and supposing rain come up, you don't need to shift, see."

"You good fellow too much," said the Kanaka gratefully. Then hoping that at last he had found one who would listen to him, he went on: "I Tamana boy, sir. I want to die my country. Supposing I die somewheres else——"

But the chief engineer did not listen. He heard footsteps approaching and he did not want to be overheard chatting with a common Kanaka.

WHEN the Kanaka moved his bed from the forecastle head to the engine-room grating, he took all his luggage with him. It chanced that the second engineer, coming on deck for his coffee next morning, saw the bundle and, prompted by idle curiosity, carried it up to the bridge to examine it.

Most of its contents were trashy articles such as are manufactured in Europe for export to countries inhabited by simple savages. There were a few nose-rings that looked like tortoise-shell but were made of celluloid, a cheap knife or two, a mirror, an imitation leather belt, some loud-patterned, gaudily-colored handkerchiefs and a flimsy concertina.

But two of the articles in the bundle were of native manufacture and these were soon passing from hand to hand, while the Kanaka stood near watching with eager eyes, trembling lest the white men meant to rob him.

The first of these articles was obviously a weapon of a grotesque but effective kind. The blade, if it can be called a blade, was a length of whale's rib lapped at one end, to afford a firm grip for the hand, with sharkskin and studded with sharks' teeth and the barbed spines of the sting-ray fish, cunningly fastened in place with wax and plaited human hair.

"Sort of thing you see in a pantomime at Christmas-time," commented the second mate.

"Fellows like you who have only gone to sea in steamers don't know good handiwork when you see it," said the captain, who considered it advisable for purposes of good discipline to keep the second mate in his proper place. "What sort of tool could you turn out if you lived on a coral island where there was no metal and no wood worth calling wood? Nothing to touch this, I'll bet.

"In my windjammer days I used to fancy myself at splicing and the like, but if I'd ever met an old shellback who could make a thing like

this with no tools but his ten fingers, and no materials but what he could pick up off the beach at high-water-mark, I'd have taken off my hat to him and asked him to give me lessons. Say, uncle, did you make this sword thing?"

"Youai. Me make him m'self," answered the Kanaka.

"How long did it take you?"

"Two, three month. I t'ink four month, p'raps."

"You hear that?" said the captain to the second mate. "And you wouldn't do it in four years."

"What's this thing?" asked the chief engineer.

He held up an article that at first sight looked as if the Kanaka had set out to plait the flat side of a basket without any clear idea of how he was to do it. A score of thin slivers of split cane were lashed together, but except for the four outside pieces no two were straight or at right angles to each or had any obvious connection with each other. Some of the canes were slightly curved, some so sharply curved that their ends almost met. Lashed to the canes on no apparent plan were a dozen or more small fragments of sea-shell.

"What's this for, uncle?" asked the mate. "Don't you hear the chief ask you?"

"For find way to my home," replied the Kanaka. He approached timidly and touched one of the pieces of shell. "That my home—Tamana." He touched another, "That Onoatoa —that Arorai—that Tapiteuea."

The captain carried the contraption into the chart-house, spread out an Admiralty chart of the Gilbert Islands and compared the two. The other white men crowded round him, craning their heads over his shoulders.

"It's a chart, all right. See here. Those big bits of shell with holes in the middle stand for the islands with lagoons in 'em, and those tiny pieces all plastered together mark what the Admiralty chart calls Medley's reef."

The mate snatched the Admiralty chart toward him and whistled with astonishment.

"See that curved bit of cane there, sir," he said excitedly. "I'll bet that's meant to show the current that sweeps round the south of Butaritari. And those parallel bits show the direction of the prevailing winds. It's a chart. There's no mistake about that. Barring that it doesn't give the depths and anchorages, I don't know that I'd want anything better if I had to take a vessel on a cruise through those islands."

The captain picked up a pair of dividers and measured the space between one shell-fragment and another.

"And each bit of shell in its right relative position," he said. "To think that that nigger without any survey instruments, without compass or protractor or sextant or anything, mind you, could plot out a chart that the Hydrographic Office 'd have no need to be ashamed of! Don't know that I'd mind giving a month's pay for it. Say, uncle, I'll give you ten dollars for this thing."

The Kanaka shook his head, and continued to shake his head though the captain's bids mounted to twenty, thirty, forty and even fifty dollars.

"Look here, uncle, have some sense," said the mate. "Captain give fifty dollars for that chart. I give fifty dollars for that sword arrangement. Bimeby when we come San Francisco you got heap plenty money. You take passage on steamer for Honolulu. Money not finish. You find other steamer take you Butaritari. Still money not finish. You savey pay trade-schooner give you passage and so you come home all right."

Still the Kanaka shook his head.

"Damme, the man don't seem to understand!" exclaimed the captain. "Fetch the boatswain to interpret."

All waited impatiently while question and answer in a tongue they could not understand passed between the two.

"He says, sir," said the Samoan at last, "that he will not sell because he think he will die soon."

"But when he's dead they won't be any use to him," said the captain.

"He says he can't go to heaven without those things. He don't mean missionary heaven: h i s people's heaven. He is ignorant heathen, sir. He think that his people's heaven is just like his home. Same island, same sea. When a chief die in his country the people put his dead body in canoe and set the sail of the canoe and let it sail out to sea. By and by when rough weather come the canoe capsize. The dead man's body sink to bottom but his ghost go sailing on in the ghost canoe—till it come to heaven. He think if he not got chart of his own islands with him when he die he might come to some other heaven, not his own people's heaven. You see he is very ignorant man, sir."

"But he won't want the sword in heaven anyway," said the mate, who supplemented his income very profitably by collecting Oriental curios for a San Francisco dealer. "Tell him I'll buy the sword."

"He say he must have his sword in heaven," explained the Samoan. "He think in his heaven people fight all day. But no one get hurt. No one get killed. And when night come all stop fighting and have great feast. Plenty turtle. Plenty roast pig. Just like Christmas Day, sir. Next morning they swim in lagoon and fight again. You see, sir, in his country this man is big chief, just like captain of ship. He think that if he don't take that sword to heaven they will think him common person. They won't let him fight. Make him dig ground and grow yam instead."

THE MATE'S eagerness to possess the sword grew in proportion to the Kanaka's obduracy. He had had no training in proselytizing, so made no attempt to uproot the man's pagan beliefs, but concentrated on the argument that he could supply himself with other specimens of the articles required for satisfactory admission to heaven as soon as he found himself among his own people once more. But still the Kanaka refused to sell. He doubted if he would live long enough, he said, to make another sword and another chart.

"Oh, get away forrad," exclaimed the mate at last, "before I kick you there!" Then he turned to the captain. "It beats me, sir," he said. "Here's a man who defies you by stowing away aboard your ship. His common sense ought to tell him that a stowaway hasn't got any right to complain however he's treated. You haven't given him the kicking he deserves. You've let him off work. And yet when we offer him a fair price, a dashed good price, for his curios he won't sell. Talk about gratitude!"

"And a nigger, too!" echoed the captain bitterly. "I'll tell you what. There's ten niggers in the world to every white man and what with all this sickly man-and-a-brother talk, if the whites don't do something mighty soon to assert themselves the nigger'll be top dog. For two pins I'd take that nigger by the scruff of his neck and drop him overboard just to show the crew that there's one white man at least who means to keep his end up."

THE KANAKA went back to the forecastle head and throughout the day, between bouts of coughing, sat staring with eager eyes toward the

Eastern horizon. At night he lay, exhausted with weakness, snoring on the engine-room grating. By day or night none of the white men on board could look at him without irritation.

It had been the captain's constant boast that he knew better than any man afloat how to deal with niggers, yet here was a nigger who defied him. The mate regarded himself as an artist in the hazing of crews, yet here was a stowaway whose illness protected him from the hazing he deserved.

The second mate, when he bawled and cursed at the crew, felt that his threats were hollow. The engineers scarcely had the heart to kick an idling stoker after the weakness they had shown toward a man especially given them to kick.

He was a constant reminder to all of the emptiness of their constant boast that they were the toughest crowd of hard-case slave drivers between Sunda Straits and Calloa.

One day the second mate devoted a whole morning to detailed examination of the chart of the Pacific Ocean and laborious wrestling with the mathematical problems involved in Great Circle Sailing. When the captain had taken the noon observation he called his attention to the chart.

"Nor'east-by-east is our course after we round the corner of New Guinea, isn't it, sir?" he asked.

"What about it?" demanded the captain.

"I was thinking that if you made it Nor'east-by-east-half-east till we are past the Gilberts it wouldn't cost much more coal in the long run and we'd pass right by that Kanaka's island. If there were any canoes out fishing you could easily drop him into one of them."

"It isn't the cost of the coal that'd worry me," said the captain. "It's the letting myself be beaten by a Kanaka. Fetch him aft and I'll talk to him."

THE KANAKA, spent with an exceptionally fierce paroxysm of coughing, had to hold on to the bulwark for support as he came.

"See here, you!" said the captain gruffly. "Mr. Mate want that sword belongah you. I want that chart. All right. Supposing you sell I take this ship to Gilbert Islands. When we come Tamana I stop ship. I make whistle sing out. Your friend come out in canoe to put you ashore. You savey."

The Kanaka shook his head feebly.

"Me no savey sell dem t'ing," he said obstinately. "I die plenty too much soon."

"He don't look as if he'd much longer to live," said the second mate, as the Kanaka tottered forward again.

"What's that to do with me?" demanded the captain.

But when the second mate came onto the bridge that night and learned that the *Surabaya* had rounded Moresby Island during his watch below, the first mate gave him Northeast-by-east-half-east as the ship's new course.

"Is the old man going to run by Tamana after all, then?" asked the second mate.

"Looks like it," said the mate. "I expect the fact of it is he's sick of the sight of the Kanaka loafing about the ship. I know I am."

But soon it seemed that the *Surabaya's* course had been changed to no purpose. The Kanaka sickened fast. Soon he could not make his daily journey from the engine-room grating to the forecastle head without men on either side to help him.

Though he mysteriously acquired a flannel shirt of the captain's, a jersey of the mate's and a grease-stained pair of the second engineer's trousers,

neither the clothes nor his bedding, neither the warmth of the engine-room by night nor the heat of the sun by day could keep him from shivering. Though the Chinese steward quite openly fed him on tinned milk and other luxuries that must have been stolen from the cabin stores, he grew daily thinner.

"I want to die my country," he said plaintively to everyone who came near him and every hour of the day the engineers demanded of the stokers why the blazes they couldn't raise more steam.

YET AS the island drew near, the Kanaka's strength seemed to come back, as if hope were giving him life, and when the tops of Tamana's tallest palms rose above the skyline, it was his quavering voice that raised the cry: 'Land-ho!'

First the wind-tossed palms came into view and then the long gleaming line of surf and, just as the sun dipped, the steamer drew abreast of an opening in the reef through which the great rollers poured unbroken and flattened out to the smooth level of the placid lagoon. But neither in the lagoon nor in the open sea could any canoes be seen.

"Looks like the Kanaka will have to come on to San Francisco after all," said the captain.

"Unless ye'll run inside the lagoon," suggested the chief engineer.

"Without a pilot!" sneered the captain. "Likely, isn't it?"

"What about lowering a boat?" asked the second engineer.

"And who's to row it? You? If I had any South Sea Islanders aboard beside the bos'n and the Kanaka himself, I might chance it, but Lascars and Malays don't understand surf work. They might reach the shore with the wind behind 'em, but they'd never get the boat back to the ship again. We'll keep off and on all night—I'll give the Kanaka that much chance—and burn a few flares to make sure the people ashore know we're here. But if no canoes put off to the ship by sunrise, he'll have to come along with us."

But when the dawn broke, it showed there was little chance of any canoes putting off. As soon as there was light enough to use the telescope, the captain searched the shore with it. He found a village. But the huts of the village were broken; their thatch torn. No one stirred.

"Smallpox! that's what's happened. Half of 'em dead, I reckon, and the other half have lit out and built a village somewhere else. It's no go, Mac. We'll have to get a move on us."

"But we're doing repairs down below," lied the chief engineer glibly. "We'll not get away before noon. I took the opportunity of lying-to all night to draw the steam from the starboard boiler. If ye'll come below, I'll show ye——"

The captain snorted and turned away. In theory he had authority in the engine-room as elsewhere, but whenever he tried to assert it the engineers deluged him with a spate of unintelligible technicalities.

The Samoan boatswain approached and told the captain that the Kanaka wished to go ashore.

"Hasn't he got sense enough to see there aren't any canoes about? What's he want me to do? Run into the lagoon and pile the ship up on a lump of coral or what?"

"He say he want to buy dinghy. Supposing you sell he'll give everything he's got. Money, sword, chart—everything."

"I thought he reckoned he couldn't get to heaven without the chart?"

"He say that if he die here perhaps he find heaven without the chart, or perhaps he have time to make an-

other before he die. But if he die some other place, he never find it—not his people's heaven—never—never."

The captain hesitated. He did not know what value a collector interested in ethnology would put on the Kanaka's two curios but he doubted whether the two combined, even with the addition of the money the Kanaka had with him, were worth as much as a new dinghy would cost. Still it was always possible to tell the owner that the dinghy had been smashed to kindling wood by a heavy sea.

"Send him along, then—and get the dinghy over the side."

The captain took the Kanaka's money and his chart and locked them both up. He let the mate take the sword. Before he went over the side, the Kanaka disposed of all the rest of his worldly goods. To the Samoan boatswain he gave his concertina. His gaudy handkerchiefs, his imitation tortoiseshell nose-rings, he distributed as far as they would go among the rest of the crew. Then he climbed feebly down the side—the second mate had already stepped the dinghy's mast and hoisted her lug-sail—and took his place at the tiller.

THE STEAMER had drifted a mile past the opening in the reef and the wind was abeam of the dinghy's course for it. But the Kanaka obviously knew all there was to know about small-boat sailing. As soon as he was beyond the lee of the ship's side he let the sail fill, then hauled in the sheet like any yachtsman.

The dinghy heeled over and scudded like a bird, close-hauled, straight for the reef-opening. All hands lined the bulwark in silence and watched him go.

But before he had gone a cable's length the captain ran up to the bridge, seized the megaphone and bawled to him to come back.

The others hardly expected him to obey, but he put about and came back.

The captain leaned over the side and handed down the chart that he said he would give a month's pay for.

"You can have this back if you want to," he said gruffly. "Pity to miss the course to that heaven of yours."

"You good fellow belongah me," said the Kanaka, his eyes brimming with tears. "I savey find heaven all right now."

"Hold on a jiffy," said the mate. He ran to his cabin and returned with the shark's-tooth sword.

"May as well go to heaven in style like a chief while you're about it," he said. "I don't want the thing. Catch!"

"You too much good-fellow," said the Kanaka. With one eloquent gesture he included all, the white men and the piebald crew, in his thanks. "Altogether, ebbury one too much good-fellow."

He let the sail fill again, but this time he steered not for the reef-opening, but straight for the reef itself.

"What's the fool doing?" said the second mate. "He'll capsize the boat in another minute."

The mate blew his whistle.

"Man the life-boat there," he shouted. "Jump to it, all hands."

"No use," said the captain. "You'll never get it into the water in time. You don't need to worry. It's his boat anyway. Can't a poor sick Kanaka die if he wants to without your interfering?"

IT WAS too late to interfere. Already the dinghy was rising on a great roller, for a long moment it hung poised on the wave's green crest, then it disappeared in a smother of dazzling foam. A minute

later far inside the lagoon the dinghy appeared again, bottom up, stove in, a broken oar floating alongside.

The chief engineer broke the long silence that followed.

"Come to think of it, he told us that was the sort of funeral a chief has a right to expect in his country. I expect he died happy."

"Sort of deserved to get what he wanted," said the second mate. "Kind of set on it, wasn't he? Dying at home and all that, I mean."

"Poor old nigger," said the mate, "I'll hope he'll find his heaven to his liking. He had a pretty tough time in this life, I reckon—pearl-diving for a Dago!"

It was the captain who first returned to his normal self.

"Blast me if you aren't all as sentimental as a bally lot of Sunday School teachers!" he sneered. "And all about a Kanaka!"

The mate roused himself and turned savagely on the second mate. "It's your watch on deck, isn't it?" he demanded. "Are you going to get any work done today?"

The second mate shook his great fist at the boatswain. "What are the men standing gaping at?" he barked. "If they wait for me to turn 'em to work they'll wish 'emselves dead before I've finished with 'em."

"Get below, you black swine," shouted the second engineer to the stokers; while the chief engineer, forgetting he had said there would be no steam before noon, rattled down the grid-ladder and set the engines going.

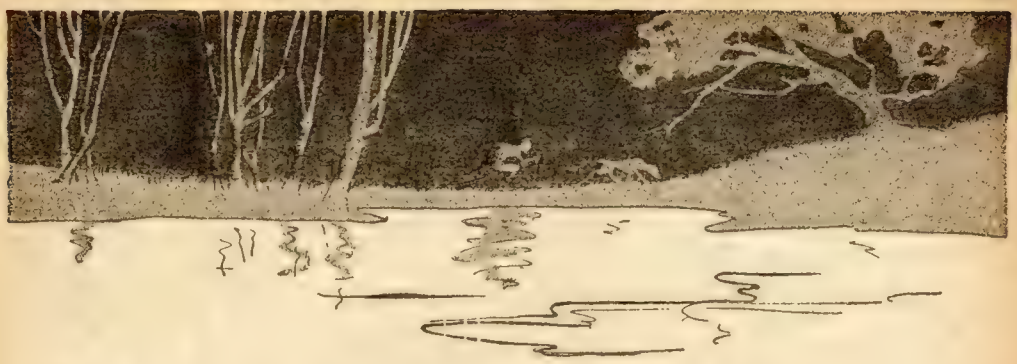
FIVE weeks later in San Francisco's dancing saloons any one of the five might have been heard boasting that they were the toughest crowd of hard cases between Suez and the Horn, that what they didn't know about hazing wasn't worth learning, and that the proper way to make a nigger work was to thrash him with a short length of wire-rope, frayed at the ends.

Dolls with Souls

In Japan the dolls of the children are believed to be endowed with life, deriving a soul from the strength of the love bestowed upon them by their tiny owners.

Some of the dolls are credited with strange power for good or evil. They confer long-desired maternity on a childless woman if they are petted and made much of. On the other hand the person who ill treats a doll is bound to meet with an appropriate misfortune.

The whole idea is a reflection of the place which children hold in the hearts of Japanese parents, who are as a rule models of patient and self-sacrificing devotion. When the dolls grow old and battered, as they must, however tenderly treated, they are reverently laid to rest on the shrine of the god Kojin, the many-armed.



The Ghost's Keeper

By HUDSON STRODE

"SISERA BETLER'S dead!"

I looked up from my desk. Mrs. Roper was standing at the door of my study with her right hip bent outward to support a pan of leafy vegetables. The solemnity of her round face only partially hid her sense of importance at being the bearer of sad news.

I tried not to frown at the interruption. I was a geologist—my interest lay in the excavated dead of thousands of years.

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said. "Take the greens to the kitchen, Mrs. Roper. My wife will pay you."

Her features momentarily sagged with disappointment at my failure to be impressed; then she turned and bustled toward the back of the house. I heard her morbidly repeating the news to my wife.

I pushed aside my papers and rock specimens, wondering if Sisera Betler had been glad to die. The farm work would be no harder on his women-folk now than it had been when he was lying there helplessly suffering.

I wondered if Lou Jean, his wife, the pretty young creature with the pathetic eyes, could be really sorry. I hoped that she would go away now and free herself from the superstitious ignorance of Sisera's mother and sister.

The latter, known as "Suster," was a sickly-looking yellowish specimen, innocuous enough; but the old woman always referred to as "Ma Betler" was something of a Tartar and on the two occasions I had seen her had filled me with loathing.

The first time was when she sold me some early strawberries at twice the usual rate. I was prepared for the extra price—tribute of a stranger to a native—but not for the wholly bad berries under the top layer.

I remember as she counted her change the fishy gleam of her eyes caverned under an overhanging, rolling forehead, and the smack of self-satisfied shrewdness with which she drew her loose lips into her mouth away from her squat nose and protruding chin.

The second time I saw her was at church, whither curiosity led me. It

was a "testimonial meeting," shortly after Ma Betler's sensational claim to have seen and talked with her nephew Elbert Durden, two months dead.

She stood by the pulpit straight and rigid with the perspiration streaming down her sagging cheeks, and stared far out beyond the congregation as though her religious fervor transcended everything material, everything mortal.

"Hit can all be done," she concluded, "through fastin' an' prayer."

Lou Jean, the daughter-in-law, was unmistakably somehow a different sort and she seemed superior to the Betlers in intelligence and ambition. My wife had taken an interest in her and had taught her to read and write a little. But during the last few weeks of Sisera's illness we had seen nothing of her.

When I heard the rattle of Mrs. Roper's empty pan heralding her return, I opened my door and asked her if she had already been to the Betlers.

"Yessir, an' I'm goin' agin now."

"All right, I'm going with you," I said. "I may be able to help them in some way."

I KEPT her walking so fast over the half-mile stretch of road to the Betler farm shanty that her efforts to tell me the particulars left her quite out of breath.

"I was there soon's he breathed his last," she informed me. "Ma and Suster took on turrible—heap worse'n Lou Jean—like a wife hadn' no trouble 'side o' their'n. And then Ma Betler started right in to prayin' to the Lord to bring Sisera back. Do you b'lieve folks has power over the dead?"

I did not intend to get myself let in for a spiritualistic argument with Mrs. Roper. So I pretended not to have heard her question and changed the subject.

When we reached the Betlers we went through the space where once a picket gate had swung and into the dirt yard with its double row of barren flower-beds outlined by chunks of broken pottery and inverted soda-pop bottles.

As we came near the seat of death Mrs. Roper reverted to her unanswered question and again asked if I believed in "sperits." Now I evaded an answer by suggesting that the tub of dirty water standing there near the well was a bad mosquito breeder.

To which remark she replied: "Insects ain't nothin' compared with grief," and preceded me into the house without knocking.

Lou Jean and the Betler girl were in the front room alone. At the sight of visitors Suster burst into inconsolable weeping and moaning.

Lou Jean did not look up for some moments. Her head was bent over her work. She was sewing—patching the knee of a pair of gray trousers (Sisera's best suit, no doubt)—patching with black cloth.

Mrs. Roper said, "Lemme sew it, hon. Maybe I can see it better."

Lou Jean raised her pretty sad blue eyes. They were dry and her mouth was drawn into a firm straight line. It had never occurred to me before what a strong chin the girl had. She yielded the sewing to Mrs. Roper without a word.

When she saw me she rose and said "Howdy, sir!" and held out her hand for me to shake.

"I'm sure I can find you a suit of clothes that will save you the trouble," I said—"if you would be so good as to accept it."

"Thank you, sir, but this is hisn'," she declined. "I b'lieve Sisera 'ud ruther wear it than another's. Thank you, sir, just the same."

I was offering my services in any capacity when Suster's tow head with

its stringy wisps raised itself from the corner and her sobbing turned into a high-pitched wail.

"Oh-hhh—Sisera's gone—and now you'll have to leave, too, Lou Jean."

"No, you're wrong. I ain't goin' to die—yet." Lou Jean's lip curled slightly at the last word.

"I mean ye'll go away," explained the sister-in-law," with Ma feelin' like she does toward ye."

"No, I'm goin' to stay. Sisera wanted I should," the widow replied quietly, as if the wishes of the dead settled the question for the relatives and for eternity.

The dismal sister of the deceased dropped the damp hem of her calico dress in surprise and jumped to her feet.

"I'm goin' to tell Ma!" she exclaimed.

AT THAT moment the figure of Ma Betler appeared in the doorway. Her eyes rested hatefully upon the daughter-in-law.

"Ma," shrieked the jaundiced Suster, "Lou Jean says she's goin' to stay *here!*"

The old woman stiffened. Her gaze went slowly about the walls of the room. But instead of regarding anything in real view she seemed to turn her vision blindman-wise into the hinterland of her own brain. Her eyes reminded me of oysters—gray, with a faint green iridescence.

"They is some as is called away, an' some as is sent away," was her cryptic reply. Then she turned and greeted me with a mere suspicious narrowing of the eyelids.

"I came to offer my services," I said. "Is there anything at all that my wife or I can do?"

Again the lids narrowed—this time with a hint of defiance. "There ain't nothin'," the old woman replied coldly. "The Lord will provide what is needful."

She was about to go when suddenly she thrust her head forward and glanced accusingly at Lou Jean. She made a sudden swoop, and picked up something lying on the floor beside the girl's chair.

It was a thick black book of imitation leather with red-edged pages—a cheap edition of the Holy Bible. In the doorway with the sacred book clutched close to her bosom, Ma Betler paused to say in a shaken but strident voice:

"He's mine—the Lord's give him to me onct—I'm goin' to have him back again. Cain't none o' yo'-all keep him from me!"

Just what it all meant I could not quite make out. Mrs. Roper was not able to explain much, but she had vague and terrible suspicions about Ma Betler.

A FORTNIGHT after the funeral, which we did not attend, walking home from the village one afternoon at nearly dusk, I took the longer turn past the country cemetery and through the woods.

I noticed that a whitewashed cross had been placed at the head of Sisera Betler's new-made grave, which was near the fence. It was still light enough to read the inscription painted in black letters on the white board. Sisera was "AT REST."

I cut off into the dark shade of the water oaks and cypress trees. The air was soothingly cool and there was a lulling whispering of the awakening night creatures and insects.

Suddenly above the music of the woodland twilight, I heard the soft singing of a woman—a bit of a hymn, plaintive and low. And by one of those pools that the north Florida woods like to conceal, I came upon Lou Jean sitting, bathing her feet at the water's edge.

She saw me and called me to her. Without the least trace of self-con-

sciousness she drew her dripping, bare feet from the fern-bound water and let rivulets sink into last year's leaves.

"Do you b'lieve dead folks can come back?" she asked, with no preliminary introduction into the subject that evidently possessed her thoughts.

"Why, I don't know," I hesitated, not sure of what she wished. "The Judgment Day, of course——"

"I don' mean that. I mean *now*—one at a time!"

I mistook her tone of dread for concealed longing. So I told her there *were* people who believed that the dead were not far away, and that some people claimed to have communicated with them after death. If she wanted spiritism, I did not wish to deprive her of such comfort as it offered.

She stared at me with fear-burned eyes. "Then I'll fight Ma to the last inch!" she declared. "I ain't goin' to let him come back!" Her fists clenched and the nails dug into her palms.

"Then you don't really want him back?" I demanded, for I saw that I had said the wrong thing.

"No, sir, I don't want Sisera to come back!" she said with emphasis. "He had a hard enough time in this world, as it was. Ain't no justice in makin' a man keep on livin' in torture when death'll give him a rest.

"But Ma is dead-set on jes' talkin' to him once more. If that was all maybe I wouldn' care. But it's her keepin' her holt on his sperit! She'd pull him to hell with her!"

The girl shuddered and looked into the blackening pool for a moment.

"And Sisera don' want to come back," she went on. "He b'lieved about Elbert Durden, an' he's scairt o' Ma. She thought more o' him than she did of anybody else. But she had a' ugly holt on him. He didn' want her to keep it always. Why, she helt down his very soul!

"That's howcome we didn' go to Marianna when he had a chanst of a good job jes' before he got sick. That's howcome my little baby died —*she* didn' be'lieve in doctors."

Lou Jean's voice hardened. "That's why I'm goin' to stay here. It was Sisera's last words. He was tired. He wanted peace. *He tole me to stay to break Ma's holt!*"

Lou Jean leaned back against a stump of a willow tree and looked up at the sky illumed with faint stars. Her eyes shone.

"I know Sisera didn' stand up to her like he oughter," she went on. "But he was good—too good. An' when it's your own Ma, an' you sick lots, an' her sayin' she'd kill herself if you didn' do what she wanted, why it ain't so easy."

Lou Jean gathered a handful of Spanish moss from a low hanging bough and pulled the tentacles apart. "I'm glad Sisera's dead," she said in a low voice. "I wisht I was dead, too!"

"I don't think you need worry about your husband," I told her by way of comfort. "I don't believe for a minute that his mother can reach him. Anyhow the only ghosts who come back are those who want to. Why don't you go away and leave those women who make your life so miserable?"

"It wouldn' be fair to Sisera to leave him alone with Ma," she said. "I got to stay there until he don't need me."

She stood up and began to pull long strips of the gray moss and gather them into her arms.

"Ma's begged me to go, and ordered me to go, and warned me. She knows why I'm stayin', and she's scairt o' me. Suster tole her. Suster was in the room when Sisera said 'Stay!'

"I'm tryin' to make Ma quit her kind o' prayin'. I hid her Bible t'other day. She cain't read it, but she thinks it's a bad sign if it ain't there when

she's prayin'. Suster found it and tole on me again. And ever since——" The girl shrugged her shoulders in defiance of both them and their torture.

She stooped to pick up some of the moss that she had dropped to the ground. I reached to help her.

"Wouldn' you like to have part of this tree moss to take to your wife?" she offered as I turned to go. "It makes fine kindlin' with a little kerosene poured on it. It burns a pretty fire, too, but it looks sorter scary if you ain't used to it."

I watched the slight wistful figure as it went off through the darkened woods along the path illuminated fitfully with the pale green glow of lightning-bugs. Lou Jean was hardly more than a child, and yet——

For some minutes I stood there pondering over the strangeness of this girl's determination to endure a house of misery, where she was hated and abused, in order to keep her dead husband from being an unwilling ghost.

THE NEXT week Mrs. Roper, my wife and I talked over the situation. We were agreed that Lou Jean should be got away from her family-in-law by some means as soon as possible.

I suggested a position that I thought I might secure for her in a small-town store which belonged to a cousin of mine in Alabama.

Mrs. Roper was convinced that it was just the thing that the girl would "hanker after." As she made her formal departure, she turned to utter in an awed whisper, with a dreadful expression on her funny features, the warning, "It ain't safe for Lou Jean to stay. She better go soon. Ma Betler ain't above murder!"

I wrote the letter about the position and went that afternoon to the village to post it. Coming home, I passed the cemetery; and there among the graves nearest the road I saw Ma Betler moving about like a body whose soul had left it to wander without a guide.

I was about to speak to her, when a huge black cat crossed in front of me. It went through the fence toward her and prowled solemnly, though indifferently, over Sisera's grave.

Ma Betler let out a yell of fright and rage. The cat whirled, arched its back, dug its claws in the dirt, and spit at her.

With a venomous hiss, the old woman tore the wooden cross from the head of the grave and hurled it at the fleeing black beast. But as the cross crashed to the earth the cat leaped aside and in terrified flight dashed madly away over the mounds and through the graveyard.

The old woman started in pursuit, throwing out her arms in violent gestures as if exorcising an impudent and perverse evil spirit, and sibilantly screaming "Scat! Scat! Scat!"

Her wiry gray hair stood out from her skull witch-like and it scattered wildly from its pinnings as she caught her foot in an angle of the hurled cross and stumbled to a kneeling posture.

Hobbling to her feet, she pushed her disheveled hair out of her face with one hand and picked up Sisera's monument with the other. Dragging the cross to the mound she stuck it back in place and started off at a rapid gait toward her house, mumbling something to herself—prayers, or imprecations.

I had not gone ten yards before Lou Jean's face appeared above some low-lying bushes. Surprised, I stopped.

"Ma gone?" she asked quietly.

'I signified by a gesture the direction the old woman had taken. Lou Jean came through the hedge, and the briers clutched at her skirt and arms

and almost tore an empty flour sack from her hand.

"Have you been selling your potatoes?" I indicated the empty sack.

She smiled and shook her head. "This here wasn't potatoes."

"The cat——?"

Lou Jean nodded. There was a triumphant twinkle in her eye.

"There won't be no fastin' an prayin' tonight!" she said. "Ma's seen a bad sign."

I told Lou Jean about the position I hoped to be able to get for her—the small-town store job which would give her more or less independence and an opportunity to learn English a little better.

For the first moment her eyes glowed with delight; then her face shadowed.

"Sir, I'm obliged to you," she said, "an' I want to go wors'n anything, but—but it ain't much use hopin' right now. It all depends. Ma's workin' powerful hard. Of course, sometimes I think it all don' mean anything. Still, I'm afraid it might.

"An' way in the night when the win' blows or the rain falls seems to me again and again I hear Sisera whisperin' encouragement to me and sayin' 'Fight her, Lou Jean, fight her.'

"An', sir, I always stood by my husband when he was livin', an' I reckon it 'ud be pretty sorry if I went back on him now that he was dead."

As I left her I invited her to come to see us, and told her that I should let her know as soon as I received an answer to my letter. Her face brightened.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Maybe—maybe by then Ma'll see it's no use," she said hopefully.

IN A couple of days the answer came. Lou Jean could have the position if she wanted it; in fact, they were short of help and would be glad to have her. I went to the Betler place with the news.

As I walked into the yard I heard a cry from within the house, and then the falling of a heavy object on the board floor and the crash of breaking chinaware.

The wild-eyed Suster rushed out on the porch and excitedly screeched: "Quick! Murder! In here—oh hurry—Lou Jean's killin' Ma!"

I could not see that Ma Betler was in much danger. To me, she seemed grimly, terrifyingly alive. Lou Jean was pinned in her arms as if in the death grip of a bear. Before I could get around the overturned table to interfere, the girl gave a superhuman push forward that sent her mother-in-law reeling against the wall.

There was a murderous greenish fire in the old woman's eyes; an ominous muscular tenseness drew her face down into heavy trenches. She did not speak, not even when I took Lou Jean by the arm and led her out of the house.

Lou Jean was badly shaken. Not until I had got her to my house and my wife had given her something to drink could she find words to tell her story.

"Ma was scairt o' me 'cause I kept her from doing what she wanted, an' mad 'cause I wouldn' leave, so she tried to pizen me," she prefaced the tale.

We learned that the old woman had put poison berries (*snake beads* they are called in the district) in Lou Jean's portion of vegetables, doubtless feeling that she was doing the will of the Lord in planning this slow and agonizing death for the one who would thwart her.

When Lou Jean came in from the fields, dinner was all ready and on the table, and just as she was taking a mouthful from her plate she saw one of the snake beads under the

greens. On examination she found five more.

"But even one would have got me if I'd 'a' swallowed it," she said. Mrs. Betler, furious at the discovery, had maniacally hurled herself upon Lou Jean.

"The old woman is insane," my wife remarked when Lou Jean had finished the story.

"I wish I could b'lieve that," the girl said. "Then I'd know she didn' have power. I orter kill her—but I cain't. I got to think o' somethin' so she'll quit tryin' to call Sisera back."

After much protestation on her part, we persuaded Lou Jean to stay at our house for some days. She helped with the housework, and my wife gave her daily lessons in reading and writing. Lou Jean learned rapidly, and seemed to take a keen interest in her study.

But it was easy to see that she was restless. Once when she and I passed the cemetery returning from doing some errands in the village, I saw her give a conscience-stricken glance in the direction of her husband's grave. That night I was certain that I heard her sobbing softly in her room.

A few evenings later she met Ma Betler by the cemetery fence. They had not spoken since the snake-bead episode, but now the old lady gloatingly informed her that Sisera was coming—in a day or two.

"I know by the signs," she said.

Lou Jean kept a stony silence, but when she got to the house and told us, she was trembling with anxiety. She clasped and unclasped her hands and said again and again, "I must do somethin' to stop her."

The next afternoon, while my wife was helping me with some typing, Lou Jean burst into the study without knocking.

"The cross is gone!" she announced, her eyes wild, her bosom heaving. "The cross from Sisera's grave! I don' like it! It don' mean no good! I know Ma's taken it home with her! Something's got to happen. Don' mind if I'm not here in time for supper—I'm going off to the woods fer a spell."

LOU JEAN did not come in until after we had finished supper. She was calm now. But she said she had a headache and did not want anything to eat. She asked if she might borrow a book from my study shelves —"one with pictures" which she had noticed before.

I told her to help herself. She said good-night to us and, after getting the book, went straightway to her room. It was obvious enough that she did not care to discuss her problems.

Shortly after midnight I was awakened by my wife, who said she had heard noises and that she felt something dreadful had happened to Lou Jean.

Just then we heard the front gate click. I threw on my clothes and we went to Lou Jean's room and called her name. I knocked on the door.

Lou Jean was not there. Her bed had not been slept in. A book lying open and face downward in the split-bottom rocker caught my eye. I picked it up.

It was an old copy of Christien's *Macabre* with the fantastically grewsome Saxe illustrations in colors. I held it out to my wife and remarked facetiously that her pupil was indeed progressing to be already studying French.

"You must find Lou Jean at once," my wife said, ignoring the book. "I'm almost positive that old Mrs. Betler has been here and in some manner spirited the girl away. She'll probably try to murder her again. Go as quickly as you can. I'm not afraid to stay here alone."

So without further ado I took my

revolver and flashlight and started out.

The night was black, and the battery of the flashlight flickeringly weak. But I was able to make out some fresh tracks in the sand just outside the gate. They pointed in the general direction of the Betler place. They were the tracks of a man's shoes, not a woman's. I was more puzzled than ever.

The battery gave out completely before I had gone a hundred yards, and I had considerable difficulty in finding my way. Twice I wandered off the road, once into a small ditch.

As I was extracting myself from a tangled mass of damp weeds, suddenly a hideous cry chilled my blood. For a second I was petrified with terror. Then I smiled foolishly as I realized that it was only the night call of a screech-owl in a tree branch overhead.

PRESENTLY I ran into the palings of the Betler lot. I was surprised to find the house in darkness. But I was determined to arouse the inmates and question them. If there were no response to my knock, I would search the place.

As I was groping along the fence, feeling for the gate opening, I was arrested by a strange noise. In the deep nocturnal quiet there came a dull, heavy blump—blump—blump! Something t h i c k and wooden was knocking on the side wall of the house, apparently under the bedroom window.

I stopped and listened. No sound came from within the house. After a pause, again the blump—blump—blump!

Then in a sort of hoarse whisper came Ma Betler's challenge, "Who's there?" No reply. Once more the question—louder.

Then a queer, doleful voice answered mournfully: "It's Sisera. You've called me from my rest."

I listened intently but the sound was not repeated. At last I found the gate, and quickly approached the side of the house whence had come the knocks. There was no sign of anyone in the yard that I could make out. I stopped at the bedroom window but could hear nothing except Suster's frightened whispering.

Then there was a creak of sagging bedsprings—bare feet hit the floor. In a hesitant, gasping croak the old woman called out: "Whur-r—whur are you—Sisera?"

Almost immediately, the heavy blump — blump—blump s o u n d e d from within the house on the bedroom door. Followed a quavering wail from Suster and a long suppressing "Sh-h-h-h" from Ma.

After a breathless p a u s e, the ghostly voice intoned like whistling, moaning November wind, "It's Sisera, Ma, it's Sisera!"

"Oh, Sisera," sobbed the old woman in mingled joy and terror, "come to me, Sisera. Whur are you?"

The g h o s t moaned in response, "Why—why did you call me, Ma? You done wrong. You done turrible wrong. I had to come through hell to git here."

There was a faint sharp sound like the quick scratch of a match. The door was flung open and a blaze of fire burst upon the blackness.

It was so unexpected, so startling, that involuntarily I, outside the window, stepped back and caught my breath in alarm. The fire gushed from a man's head—fiendish blue and yellow flames. The face was horrible—like decomposed flesh, green and black spotted. The body was clothed in a gray suit, and in the dazzling light I distinctly saw a large black patch on one of the knees.

Suster shrieked blood-curdlingly and buried her face under the covers.

Ma Betler threw up her hands, tottered and fell to the floor.

"Jesus God!" she exclaimed. "Jesus God!"

The door closed on the apparition and the room was plunged into darkness. The girl continued to blubber piteously under the bedclothes. I heard Ma Betler raise herself to her feet, and then again drop to her knees.

"Suster," she whimpered weakly. "hit's judgment come upon me. I didn' know hit was like that. Sisera didn' wan to come back. God forgive me. I won't call no more."

SUDDENLY a jagged flare of light rifled the pitchy spaces of the back yard. I ran around the corner of the house to investigate.

There by the well was a human figure apparently pulling flames from its head and struggling to quench the fire with water from the well bucket.

"Lou Jean! Good God!" I cried under my breath. In a moment I had thrown the girl to the ground and drenched her with a full washtub of water.

"Don' make any fuss," she whispered, panting. "Ma mus'n' know."

"But they must help me," I protested. "You may be seriously injured."

"No, sir, I can stand it—I ain't burnt much. The green slime and the soot I dabbed on my face helped a lot, and I wrapped three wet towels around my head before I put on the moss. I ain't swallered flame."

She caught my arm. "Take me to your house, quick," she pleaded. "And, for Jesus' sake, don' make no fuss. It 'ud spoil ev'ything."

"But——"

"Please, sir, I'd ruther die than Ma should know," she maintained. "*Sisera's free now.* And so am I!"

The imperiousness of her tone made me obey. It was her secret: if she wanted to keep it even at the expense of her life, it was not for me to give away.

I picked the girl up carefully in my arms. One sharp little groan of agony escaped her, but no other complaint the whole half-mile's distance to my house.

She was not an impossible burden for she weighed scarcely a hundred pounds and I was a heavy six feet. She kept so still that I supposed she had lost consciousness.

After a few minutes she opened her eyes and asked with curiosity how I had happened to be there. I explained briefly, and told her what I had seen.

"I told you that tree moss looked scary when it was burning," she reminded me. She added apologetically, "I'm sorry I ruint your suit, sir—powerful sorry."

I told her it didn't matter. Then she did seem to lose consciousness. She closed her eyes and, making the sort of sobbing noise a child does at the end of a crying spell, she relaxed limply in my arms. She did not stir or speak again until we reached home.

MY WIFE and I gave Lou Jean first aid (fortunately I had a large bottle of picric acid) and in the morning I telegraphed for a physician from Tallahassee. He arrived at noon. His report on the girl's condition was encouraging, but he insisted that she be kept in bed for at least a fortnight.

"The patient is more than brave about her burns," he commented, "but she seems to have come through some great emotional shock. She should be kept very quiet."

After taking the doctor to the station that afternoon I returned home by the cemetery way. I was interested to see that the white cross had been replaced at Sisera's grave, proclaiming that he was once more "AT REST."

When I told Lou Jean about the cross, she nodded slightly, with a wan but triumphant smile.

"I've won my fight!" she said succinctly in a low voice, and stared up at the ceiling.

Presently she asked me if I could still get "that job" for her. I assured her that I could.

She thanked me, and said "I'm goin' to take it jes' as soon as I get well. There's things in the world that I mus' learn. I know, sir, we're only a lot o' poor crackers around here—full o' hookworm an' malaria an' ignorance. But it ain't altogether our fault. Of course now it's too late to do anything with the old uns—they're sot—but the young uns can be taught."

She closed her eyes as if to go to sleep. "Good-night," I said. "If the pain gets bad, ring the little bell that my wife is going to put here by your side."

"Thank you, sir, I can stand it all right," she answered resolutely and unafraid.

The quality of her tone made me turn and ask, "Lou Jean, don't you realize how foolish you were? Didn't you know what a tremendous risk you were taking in burning kerosene-soaked moss on your head?"

"Well—no, sir—I reckon I didn' think there'd be that much danger," she confessed slowly. "I aimed to put the fire out in a minute, but it sorta got away from me. I reckon if you hadn' come along I'd 'a' burnt to death—'cause I sure wouldn' 'a' called for help from Ma and Suster."

Struck by her obstinate pride, I demanded: "Do you mean that you would have burnt up rather than ask their help?"

Lou Jean clenched her teeth and replied with dogged conviction: "I'd 'a' burnt to a crisp without a word."

"Well, if you had been so foolish," I pointed out, "Mrs. Betler would have known the truth."

"Yes, sir, that's so," she admitted. "But don't you see—then it wouldn't 'a' mattered so much."

I looked at the girl sharply. "What do you mean?" I asked severely.

A light like a sacrificial flame seemed to shine in Lou Jean's eyes, and she said simply in a quiet voice that throbbed with overtones: "It wouldn' 'a' mattered because *then*—I would have been *with* Sisera—*an' I could 'a' helt him from the Other Side!*"

Double Pinochle

A TWO PART STORY—
CONCLUSION

By
CHARLES
WESLEY
SANDERS

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Old JOE DICKS *has been murdered and* SIMPSON, *the unpleasant and disliked sheriff, and* MR. TOM HILL, *the mellow, popular town marshal who is telling the story, go to the Dicks home to investigate the crime.*

TOMMY MORTON, *a young newspaperman, takes* MR. TOM HILL *to the murder scene in his car. On the way they speak with* LENA TORQUATUS, *with whom* TOMMY *is in love. She is the fiery, beautiful, and somewhat isolated daughter of* ALEKSANDROS TORQUATUS, *the fruit and bootleg dealer, known as* TORKY.

At the Dicks home they find STANLEY DICKS, *clean young sailor son of old* DICKS, *who had hated his father because of his neglect, and who had just quarreled with him.* STANLEY *came back for a visit because of* JANET WENTWORTH, *a quiet, good, and also beautiful girl, who lives with her father, a mild, good-natured railroad section gang foreman.*

SIMPSON *accuses* STANLEY *of the murder and places him under arrest.* MR. TOM HILL *takes charge of* STANLEY *and, when* SIMPSON *goes with his deputy,* CRAIG, *to round up the neighbors, lets him go to* JANET, *whom he has taken to her aunt's house after the murder.*

WENTWORTH *claims that he spent the hour of the murder on the bridge, and* LENA *tells* MR. TOM HILL *that the stiletto with which* DICKS *was killed belonged to her father, who had given it to* JANET.

CHAPTER IV

"HERE IN THE DARK"

I HAD been taking in everything that Lena told me. I had argued about Janet with my mouth, but I had been turning something else over in my brain at the same time. That was that Lena knew too much about the killing of Dicks. Another thing was that she hated Janet.

I didn't attach much importance to that last, for I saw now that Lena probably hated all the girls she met. She had a notion that people would believe anything about her that they wouldn't believe about other girls. So she had gone sour.

Still, she was a girl. There was no getting around that, and she deserved from me just the same gentleness that any other girl deserved.

I have seen many babies in our village grow up to womanhood. I have seen some of them marry happy. I have seen some that didn't do so well.

I have seen them die of old age, it

seemed, at forty. I have seen them fade from beauty to a drab middle age. I have watched them and wondered about them, and so I have to give all of them a squarer deal than it's necessary to give a man.

I stood looking down at Lena for a while. She had rested an elbow on the table and her head on her uplifted hand. She wasn't as beautiful right this minute as I had always thought her to be. There was something ugly in her mind, I am sure, and it seemed to wipe the beauty out of her face.

Her lips, I found, were a little too heavy as she pouted now, and her face was a little too broad since the softening color had gone out of it.

I marked all this, and then something struck me as I glanced at her forearm. That forearm would have done credit to many a man. There was strength in it. Also I had no doubt that it could move the hand with the quickness of light.

I BENT down to Lena, lifted her chin in the cup of my hand, and tried to look into her eyes. She kept them covered with her lids. I saw that there was a queer network of purple veins on those lids. I had never noticed them before. That, I suppose, was because I had never held her head up like this while her eyes were closed as well.

"Lena!" I said, sharp but low.

"Well?"

Still she wouldn't open her eyes.

"Afraid to look at me?" I asked.

Her lids flew wide open. She stared straight at me. No, there wasn't any fear in those eyes. They had that same kind of a shallow look, as if they had been glazed over to shut inside of Lena's head whatever was there.

"Do you think I'm afraid of anything, Mr. Tom Hill?" she asked.

I could feel that she wasn't afraid of anything. And there you were! She was strong, she was quick, and she had courage. Also she hated most everybody because she thought they didn't take her at her real value. It was a combination that I couldn't afford to ignore.

"Lena," said I, still sharp but low, "did you kill Dicks yourself? Did you want his money to blow away from here to some place where folks would look up to you? Did you think that if you couldn't get the respect you wanted on your own hook, you could buy it? There must have been quite a lot of money in that chest of Dicks, Lena?"

WHILE I spoke, I had been waiting for her to interrupt me. I had sort of hoped she would do it, for if she did, if she got indignant, it would look as if she wouldn't even let me put questions like them into words. But she didn't interrupt.

She made a little sound through her nose—it wasn't a snort exactly but maybe second cousin to one—and then she smiled, a smile that made me think of the sun shining on the ice in Lake Erie. It was a wintry smile.

"You are a thousand miles from home, Mr. Tom Hill," she said. "You are wandering. Come right back. No, I didn't kill Dicks."

"Who did kill him, then?"

She got up slow and easy as if she was satified with the way things was stacking up.

"I think you and I have gone far enough for the present," she said. "That deputy has gone for Stanley Dicks and the Wentworth girl. My father hasn't been talked to yet. Wentworth hasn't told why he was at the railroad bridge. Gather up the loose ends and then come back to me, Mr. Tom Hill."

It wasn't a bad idea. I never believe in rushing things. You try to rush 'em and you are likely to find yourself rushing into a stone wall.

Let 'em develop, let 'em come up slow and easy, and grab 'em as they come, is my motto.

"S'pose we go back to the Dicks place," I said.

She shot a look at me then. I expect she didn't believe I would agree so quick.

That wasn't bad either. She had been leading trumps right along, and now, for a minute, she was out of them. I think she was beginning to suspect that I had been holding a trump for her ace.

"All right," was all she said, however, though her tone wasn't just what it had been.

WE WENT back to Dicks' and found Simpson fuming and fretting. I knowed as soon as I stepped into the house that he had been questioning Wentworth some more and hadn't got any place with him. Wentworth was scared and showed it, but he wasn't so scared but what he could hold his tongue.

Tommy Morton had drawed himself back into a corner. His cap was over his eyes and beneath it his face was still white. For once he wasn't smoking. He shifted his too bright eyes to Lena and kept them there, but she didn't look at him.

"What did you find out from this girl, Hill?" Simpson asked me

"Nothin'," I answered.

"I demand that you tell me what you and she talked about."

"If it does you any good to demand, go on and demand yourself black in the face," said I.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"You are a better guesser than you are demander," I said.

"All this will come out in court," he yells.

I walked over to Dicks' body. I wanted to tell Lena to come and watch me, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I knowed that if she had killed Dicks she might break at sight of him, but it was too strong a play for me to make with a woman.

However, the same idea come to Simpson, but in respect to Wentworth.

"You going to examine that body, Hill?" Simpson asked.

"Such was my intention," said I.

"Wentworth," he ordered, "you stand right here at the foot of the cot and watch him do it."

QUEER things out of the past bobs up in a man's mind every now and then. Immediate I was in the midst of a winter day down on the railroad. One of Wentworth's men had been run over by a train. He was badly cut up. Wentworth had cared for him till a car come to take him to the hospital. Wentworth had never turned a hair. If Simpson thought the sight of Dicks' body would shake Wentworth, he had another think coming.

Wentworth stood up and I uncovered Dicks. It didn't take me more'n a minute to find out what I wanted to know. Dicks had been stabbed five times, and every stab had been made by a thin knife. I had a notion it was a long knife, too, just such a knife as Lena had spoken of. I covered up the body again.

I looked up at Wentworth, but there was no sign of sickness in his face, any more than there had been. Simpson was staring at him but, as Wentworth went back to his seat, Simpson gave a real snort of disgust.

"Hard-boiled, ain't you?" he asked.

"There wasn't nothin' there to scare a man," Wentworth said. "I have seen worse."

I glanced over at Lena and nodded, but she didn't nod back. She had gone kind of tight-lipped. I felt sure she hadn't watched me. She had just imagined what I was doing, and it had got to her.

I wondered again if she had killed Dicks. His roll would have let her travel far away from a place where she certainly wasn't happy.

Simpson got up and began to pace the floor. Every now and then he stopped and lifted his head, and I knowed that he was listening for Craig's return.

"You wait, Hill," he said. "If we don't get young Dicks back, you will sweat."

"I sweat more or less yesterday," I told him. "The weather has been too hot for a man of my build."

He snorted again, and again started his pacing. By the time he reached the front door, however, there was the sound of a car coming down the hill.

He rushed outside and I went to the door. I seen the car stop and Simpson run up to it and shove his head inside. I knowed he was chewing the rag with Craig.

Pretty soon Simpson stood back and Craig got out of the car. They come up to the front door fast.

"Well, you have put the fat in the fire, Hill," Simpson said. "Young Dicks has flew the coop. He isn't at that girl's aunt's. Neither is she. They have run off together. The aunt said they got away in a hurry."

BEHIND me, in the room, there was a queer sound. I wheeled around. Lena had slumped back against the wall. Tommy had run to her and he was holding her up.

"Help me to get her to a chair," Tommy panted.

I went over and picked up Lena and put her down in a chair gentle. She had pretty near fainted but not quite.

Her eyes come open in a minute, and when she found Tommy Morton's arm across her shoulders she shrugged away from him. That was funny. Here she had been complaining that nobody loved her, and now she was spurning Tommy, who I was sure really did care for her.

Danged if human life ain't a mixed-up mess. When the numbers is sorted seems like the odd numbers can't find no place for themselves except alongside the evens. Tommy couldn't turn no whiter than he was, so he just backed to the wall and stood there.

"Well, Hill," Simpson snapped, seeming not to get the significance of Lena's little attack, "you seem to have taken charge here. What is the next move of the great detective?"

That was a rotten jab. I ain't a detective and I have never said I was. The only thing I have ever done was to study people, and I don't think real detectives do that.

But I wouldn't let on to Simpson. I wouldn't give him no satisfaction in nothing. I had taken a positive dislike to the man in this short time, and taking a dislike to people in a short time or a long time is a thing I seldom do. Dislike only heats up the blood and makes a kind of a distemper in a man. However, there is a limit, and Simpson was more than the limit.

"Why," said I, "I have got this matter pretty well arranged in my head. I know just about how it will turn out. A few details ought to be cleared up, however."

Simpson's jaw went slack again. His eyes popped out.

"You mean to say you got a clew, Hill?" he asked.

"Clew!" said I. "Gosh, I have never worked on a case where the clews stuck out so. You ain't at a loss, are you, Simpson?"

HE TRIED to pull himself together, but he couldn't do it. I expect he had remembered some of the other cases I had worked on and in which

I had been more than lucky. So he come over to me.

"Look here, Hill," he whispered, "let's work together on this thing."

"Let's," said I.

I can't, as a rule, fool people none on how I feel toward 'em. Either I like 'em or I don't like 'em. Simpson seemed to read a lot into that little word of mine. He even smiled and his whisper got lower.

"You know you will get all the credit in this town, Hill," he said. "It's the county I'm thinkin' of."

"Well," I said, "let your mind wander over the county. It's a big county, one of the biggest in Ohio."

"All right, Hill," he chuckled. "Mr. Tom Hill—er—I should say."

"Er, yes," said I.

Well, he thought he was foxy and he wouldn't take no for an answer. He wanted to know what I figured ought to be done next.

"Why," I said, "where is Torky? He usually doesn't close till two—three o'clock in the morning. We ought to find out where he is."

"Young woman," said Simpson, turning to Lena, "where is your father?"

"At his store," Lena answered, prompt.

"You said he was over here," I told her.

"He was for a minute. He looked in at the door and then he went on to his store. I guess he isn't interested in murders."

Well, she was too cussed cool all of a sudden, after her faint. She riled me some.

"Simpson," I said, "you can ask her a question or two. Ask her how come her father gave a stiletto to the Wentworth girl."

"How was that?" Simpson asked most joyous.

Lena put her hands on her hips and tilted her head on one side.

"My father isn't so old," she said. "Not yet forty-five. Why shouldn't he give a present to the Wentworth girl. Think she is too proud to take it from him?"

"That'll do," I said.

"You asked me," she snapped.

"Well," I told Simpson, "we will go down to Torky's store. Your deputy can stay with these people. Want to go, Tommy?"

"I'll stick here," Tommy said, and that was the first time I had ever known him to fail to follow up the news.

ME AND Simpson started for the door. We got as far as the threshold when Stanley come up on it.

Do you know, I felt as if a sudden cool breeze had come blowing over me on a hot day. I had been sure Stanley would come back, but when Craig had reported that he and Janet were missing, I had had a sweaty minute of doubt.

"Back, Stanley?" said I, careless.

"Back," he said.

Simpson made the mistake of laying his hand on Stanley's arm. Stanley blazed all of a sudden. I seen then that he had not been quite himself when he had come up on the threshold. He wasn't excited outwardly, but something strong, maybe something a little wild, was running through him.

"Simpson," he said, pulling away from the sheriff, "you keep your paws off me. Arrest me if you want to, but don't try to mandhandle me. I'll break your neck if you do."

There was more passion in the boy's voice than was warranted by what Simpson had done. I saw that something had happened to him while he had been away.

"There, there," I said, soothing. "Simpson will keep his hands off you, Stanley."

"He better," said Stanley.

He took a step into the room, and

I watched him. I saw his eyes go to Lena's face.

By gosh, he was giving that girl a signal of some kind, or trying to, but she wasn't accepting the signal. She looked at him for about one-half of one second and then she looked at the floor. I felt that that was the queerest thing that had happened tonight. I believed I knowed Stanley Dicks.

I was sure he was no lad to have two girls on his staff at one time. He had been paying court to Janet, however, and here he was trying to flash a signal to Lena; and Lena was turning him down! After what Lena had said about the hand of every man being against her that didn't seem reasonable.

I FELT that I had to get to the bottom of this mystery. I have found out that if a man is telling a wrong story, he may stumble when he tries to repeat it. So I snapped at Stanley:

"Stanley, tell us just how you found your father dead."

"I've told that once," he said.

"Tell it again," I ordered.

"Why, I came into the house and found him dead on the floor."

Well, you'd be surprised how a man can shoot in the dark and sometimes hit the bull's-eye.

"There wasn't no one else here?" I asked.

"Nobody," he said, firm but low.

"Oh!"

It was a kind of a gasp, kind of a sob, from Lena. We all turned to look at her. She had her back to the wall and her hands was spread out against the wall on either side of her. She had gone as white as Tommy was.

But she was hard. Oh, but that girl was hard. I think in that minute she was a thoroughly bad girl in her thoughts.

"Why do you lie?" she whispered.

"Lie?" said Stanley, and his voice was fierce.

"Lie!" Lena said. "You know that Wentworth girl was here when you came in. You know you found her here in the dark. Why did she change from a white dress to a black dress before you took her to her aunt's? Was it because the fine ladies are wearing a good deal of black this season?"

Lena was in a fury now. Her lips was twisted, and danged if I didn't expect foam to come to 'em every second. "Where is that white dress now?" she asked in a high, thin voice.

CHAPTER V.

PINOCHLE

I BELIEVED that Lena hated Stanley then, and he seemed to think so, too. A black look came over his face and a puckery look between his eyes.

Still he proved himself to be a gentleman. He just lifted himself up to his full height, and he forced himself to be calm when he spoke.

"Madam," he said, "you are mistaken. That is all I have to say."

You know, when a person is fighting mad, as Lena was then, he or she wants the other person to get fighting mad. There isn't nothing like a cool front to take the starch out of anger.

It took the starch out of Lena's anger, and it done something more to her. It made her afraid. Stanley was showing contempt as near as he would allow himself to show contempt to a lady, and that got under Lena's skin.

She doubled up her fist and pressed the knuckles against her lips. All the while she kept her eyes on Stanley, and there was a funny look in them eyes, a kind of a stricken look. It

seemed to me that Lena was asking herself if she hadn't gone too far.

"Mr. Dicks," she said in a faltering voice, "I didn't mean any harm."

"Why do you hate Miss Wentworth so?" Stanley asked.

"Hate her?" Lena's voice was as weak and thin as water.

"Yes, hate her. You've always hated her. She has tried to be your friend, but you wouldn't let her."

"I—I have always been pleasant to her," Lena said.

"Till lately," said Stanley.

LENA had, of course, taken her knuckles from her lips while she spoke, but now she pressed them back harder than ever, and a kind of a little whimpering sound come from behind them.

Lena didn't have no color in her face at all just then, and she was positively ugly. You see, she wasn't built on no delicate lines. She depended a good deal for her looks on her color and the life that generally showed in her face, but now that them was gone she was faded out.

"No, no," she whispered, taking the knuckles away again. "Not till lately."

"You slapped her one night recently," Stanley said.

"I didn't! Well, I was mad. She made me mad."

"A gentle girl like her," Stanley said.

Lena's color come back then as swift as a flash of lightning in the sky. It blazed in her face and made her beautiful in a terrible kind of a way.

"That gentle girl," she sneered. "You fool! You sickening fool!"

Well, there it was! Hell, they say, ain't got no fury like a woman scorned. That's all right far as it goes, but it don't go far enough. Hell, I should say, ain't got no fury like a scornful woman.

And Lena was scornful now. Maybe she wasn't scornful enough; maybe she was too scornful. At any rate I seen that she was in love with Stanley.

So now I had this much: Stanley was in love with Janet. Lena was in love with Stanley. Tommy Morton was in love with Lena.

Janet, undoubtedly, was in love with Stanley, and what lay between them two was, as far as I could make out, the only sweet, clean thing in the whole business.

One thing come clear to me, of course. That was that Lena was trying to frame Janet. She was trying to separate Janet from Stanley, so that she might have a chance at the boy herself. No use making a mystery out of that.

THEN there was the matter of Stanley's being practically busted and of Dicks' hidden money.

Would Lena kill a man for his money? Just possibly not if she wanted the money only for herself. But if she could put Janet out of the way and provide herself with money to give Stanley, wouldn't she figure that she had the inside track?

Of course she was all wrong if that was the way she was sizing Stanley up, but I judged by now that she was a girl that was ruled more by her feelings than by her reason.

I could imagine her, alone in her house, torturing herself with thoughts of Janet being with the man she was crazy about; for I thought that was the proper label to give what she would call her love for Stanley. She was just off her noodle about him.

"Stanley," I said sharp, "too many lies have been told already. The way to get at the heart of this matter is for everybody to tell the truth. Has Lena told the truth about Janet's being here when your father was killed?"

STANLEY stood looking at the floor for a long time. I let him take as long as he wanted. At last he looked up and his eyes were kind of far away.

"Mr. Tom Hill," he said, "I am here to tell the truth if everybody else will tell the truth. First, I would like to know how Miss Torquatus found out that Janet was in this house."

Simpson had called me a detective. I had knowed all along that I wasn't!

Stanley was, right this minute. With one question he had split things wide open. Lena went back against the wall, staring hard at him, her arms spread out at her sides again.

"Why, why," she said, "I just happened to see her."

"How did you happen to see her?" Stanley asked. "Where were you?"

"I was over home," Lena said, getting command of herself a little. "I heard some one scream and ran to the door.

"That Wentworth girl came out of this house and scooted past mine to her own. She had on a white dress, I tell you.

"Pretty soon you came along and went into the house here. You came out in a minute and ran to her house. When you and she came out again, she had on that black dress. You can explain that.

"You can also explain what she did with the stiletto my father gave her."

"She returned that stiletto to your father," Stanley said.

"She didn't! He would have told me if she had. My father was silly about her. He was always talking about her. He told me every little thing that passed between them."

Stanley's face got hard. He couldn't prevent a sneer from twisting his lip.

"That greasy Greek!" he said.

"I, too," Lena cried, shrill. "I am a greasy Greek, eh?"

"Certainly not," said Stanley. "You are no more like your father than a rose is like an onion.

"Well, lady, you are mistaken about Miss Wentworth's leaving here alone. She left here with me, as far as the front door. I stood in the front door for a few minutes and then I went over to her house."

"You gave her time to change her dress, Stanley?" I asked.

"Time to change her dress," he answered. "There were blood spots on the white dress. I wrapped a stone inside it and threw it into the river."

SIMPSON stepped forward now, all eager.

"Lay off, Simpson," I said. "Keep back. Never stop a machine when it is running smooth."

He stopped halfway up to Stanley.

"You didn't come along by the front way and come into the house?" I asked.

"I didn't," he said. "I came in by the back way.

"If you must know, Miss Wentworth and I had been down by the river. When we got here, she found she had left her vanity case down on the bank. I told her to wait a minute and I would run down and get it. She stood right in front of the house. I wasn't gone more than five minutes.

"When I came back, I came in here by the back way, and she was in this room. The light was out and she was bending over my father. That was how she got the stains on her dress.

"She said she hadn't stood in front of the house for more than a minute when she heard a groan." Stanley's head went up, proud.

"She is a brave girl as you must know, Mr. Tom Hill," he went on. "She ran right in here to see what was wrong.

"My father was barely alive. He couldn't speak, though Miss Wentworth kept asking him what had happened to him.

"By the time I got here, my father was dead. I told Miss Wentworth to run home. When we got to the door I noticed those stains. I told her to change her dress and come out. She did and I took her to her aunt's.

"I didn't want her mixed up in this thing, naturally. There's the truth for you, Mr. Tom Hill."

"How was it about Lena slapping her and about that stiletto?" I asked.

"Torquatus himself asked her to make a friend of his daughter," Stanley answered. "Out of the kindness of her heart, Miss Wentworth began to go over there. She tried to make friends with this girl, but Lena wouldn't have it.

"One night when Miss Wentworth went over there, she found Lena crying with her head on the table. She put an arm across her shoulders, and Lena jumped up and slapped her before she could defend herself.

"About the stiletto: One night Miss Wentworth was over there when Torquatus was at home. Torquatus went into his room and come out with that knife. He said it would make a fine paper cutter and he asked Miss Wentworth to take it.

"She wouldn't at first, but Torquatus said he wanted her to. He had come close to her, and he said that he was afraid for his daughter. He said she had threatened to kill herself.

"He said he had had a gun in the house but he had taken it to his store. He wanted to get every weapon out of the house.

"Miss Wentworth was shocked, of course. Again, out of the kindness of her heart she accepted the knife. She brought it home with her but later she returned it."

SIMPSON then had one of the very few ideas that he has ever got in his lifetime. It wasn't bad at that. I must give credit where credit is due.

"Didn't it occur to Miss Wentworth that if Lena wanted to use a knife, she could use the butcher knife or the bread knife or any confounded knife?" Simpson asked.

"It didn't occur to Miss Wentworth," said Stanley, dry. "She was just horrified to think Lena might be planning to hurt herself.

"It occurred to me, however. That's just what I told Miss Wentworth.

"She rather laughed at herself for being so stupid and she took the knife back to Torquatus that minute, he being home to supper."

"Was Lena there when the knife was returned?" I asked.

"She wasn't. She was uptown some place. Torquatus tried to talk to Miss Wentworth about Lena then, but Miss Wentworth wouldn't stay to listen to him. He was complaining about having to get his own meal when Miss Wentworth left."

"You didn't know about that, did you, Lena?" I asked.

"It's a lie," Lena said sullenly.

"Did you ever have a fight with your father, Lena?" Stanley asked. "Did you ever threaten to leave him flat?"

"I never did."

"Not two nights ago?" Stanley asked. "You and he didn't have a stormy scene two nights ago? He didn't curse you, and you didn't scream once? You didn't plan to leave him?"

"I didn't."

Stanley stood looking at the floor for a minute. His face got the color of a brick.

"This is a desperate situation," he said with a kind of a sigh. "I have got to ask a thing I wouldn't dream of asking in ordinary circumstances.

"When I had been home four days and my father had gone uptown, did you come to the front door and rap? When I went to the door, did you

stand looking up at me, smiling? Did you ask me to go for a row on the river?"

LENA'S bosom was raised high as she took in her breath. Then it dropped, and she didn't seem to breathe scarcely at all. All of a sudden there was a funny look in her eyes.

"Yes, Stanley," she said, soft. "That is true. I asked you to go with me, and you wouldn't. I wanted you to go."

With that funny look in her eyes, she stood there staring at him. The boy's face was like a beet now. This was rough sledding for him.

"The next night did you meet Miss Wentworth and me at the head of Buckeye Street?"

"I—I don't remember."

"Oh yes you do, Lena. You stopped in front of us. You put your hands on your hips and stared at Miss Wentworth for a full minute.

"Then you pushed your face up to hers and laughed. You frightened her, Lena, and she was trying to be your friend."

Lena said nothing. Her eyes had gone to the floor. Stanley's face went suddenly white, but he pressed on with his hard job.

"Lena," he said, "you saw Miss Wentworth come out of this house. You didn't see me at all. You made up that part of your story.

"The first you saw of me was when you caught sight of me taking Miss Wentworth away. You wanted to make sure that I wouldn't by any chance be accused, didn't you, Lena? So you said I came after Miss Wentworth had come into the house here."

"I told the truth," Lena declared, though her lips quivered.

"It seems not," Stanley said, "but I am saying to you that you had better tell the truth now. You may be sorry if you don't."

Lena shot a wide-eyed look at him. There was something definite and certain about the boy now, as the lawyers say. And he was not threatening Lena. I didn't know what he was doing, but he wasn't doing that.

Lena seemed to see it, too. She started toward him, but he held up his hand, and she stopped.

"I can bring Miss Wentworth here," he said. "I'll do it now."

He turned toward the door.

"Wait," Lena yelled.

HE WAITED for a minute. She stared at him some more.

I saw she was trying to figure out what his intention was, but she couldn't make it. I think she decided to gain a little time.

"Well," she said, "bring her here."

Stanley started for the door again. Simpson took a step after him. I shoved my good right arm out and barred Simpson's way.

"You going to let him get out of our sight again?" Simpson asked.

"But not out of our mind," said I. "Let him go, Simpson. If you knowed as much about people as I do you would know that he will be back. Use your noodle, Simpson."

"It's the cussedest way to handle a suspect ever I seen," Simpson said, "but—er—well, mebbe you know best, Mr. Tom Hill."

"My best ain't never none too good," said I, "but it seems to be all we have."

"What'll we do now?" he asked.

"We'll go down to Torky's store," I said. "You can leave your deputy here."

"All right," he said, and he turned to Tommy Morton, who had been silent longer than I had ever knowed him to be silent in his life.

"Mr. Morton," he said, "would you like to have me swear you in as deputy. Then you can help guard these people."

Tommy Morton didn't even laugh.

He just give Simpson a look. I seen that Simpson was trying to cultivate him so Tommy would lay off him in the paper.

"Very well," said Simpson, stiff. "Let's go, Mr. Tom Hill."

WE WENT down the hill towards Torky's store after Simpson had give Craig enough instructions to have taken an army over the top.

I seen, as we approached the store, that it was dark in front, but there was a light shining through a rear window.

I went along the side of the store with Simpson bringing up the rear. We come to a window and looked inside.

Torky and two other men was sitting at a table, playing cards. Torky was dealing and I stood and watched him.

Then I went up to the door, threw it open, and stepped inside, followed by Simpson. Torky looked up.

"Good evening, Mr. Tom Hill," he said, civil.

I didn't say nothing. There is a time when silence is golden. I ranged up to the table and stood at Torky's elbow, so close that I almost but not quite touched him. I have told you he was a greasy man.

Simpson went over to the other side of the table. Torky didn't look up at me.

Keep that in your mind. He didn't look up at me, and he didn't ask me what I had found out about the murder of Dicks.

WELL, I play pinochle myself. It is the best card game going, even though the papers has lots of jokes about it. You got to watch your cards when you play pinochle.

I had knowed for a long time that Torky was a good player. I had been in and out of his place at odd and even hours, trying to catch him in his liquor business, and I had stood and watched him play this game just as I was doing now.

I had never seen him forget the cards or miss declaring what he had in his hand.

Maybe you don't know about pinochle.

Well, in a two-handed game, you turn your trump and you can declare only after you have taken a trick and you can make only one declaration at a time.

In a three-handed game, you have a widow of three and you bid. After the bidding, you take the widow, meld all you've got, and declare trump. Then you discard three cards and play.

Torky finished dealing, and he got the bid at three hundred and ten. He picked up the widow, and I watched him kind of careless at first as he melded his stuff and made it hearts.

Then he discarded three cards. I wasn't careless no more. I was popeyed. I watched Torky like a hawk through the hand.

THAT was sufficient for the time being. I had another job on my hands. Up from Torky, in addition to the general smell of him, had come the odor of cheap whisky.

Thinks I to myself: maybe this is the night I get my reward for having watched Torky so long.

I begun to look around. At Torky's elbow was a row of canned tomatoes. Torky keeps a few things like that in addition to his bananas and oranges.

I had a hunch that since Torky had been drinking, there was a bottle not far away. He wouldn't get up every time he wanted a drink, for I was sure he had been shooting quite a few. I had heard say he could carry liquor without showing it much.

So when he had his hands full of cards on the next deal and was sorting them out, I stepped quick over to

the row of tomatoes and pulled four-five of them to the floor.

There was a bottle of white liquor staring me in the face. Torky tried to come to his feet. He shot out a couple of oaths.

Well, this here Simpson, like many new officers, is fond of flourishing the gun the law gives him the right to tote. He stepped back and come out with the gun.

"Don't stir, gents," he said, real severe. "If you do, I will have to plug you."

Torky went back into his seat, and the other two men sat as still as could be. None of them even laid down their hands.

I took up the poison bottle and dropped it into my pocket.

"Come along, Torky," said I. "You are under arrest."

Torky couldn't turn pale; he was too greasy, too swarthy. So he took on kind of a green color.

"What for?" he asked.

"Possession of liquor," said I.

"I s'pose I got to go with you," he said. "You will have to fix my bail, Mr. Tom Hill. You can't put me in your cell for the night."

"I could," I said, "but I have no objection to your furnishing bail. Come along."

We went out into the street. The two friends of Torky's tagged behind us as we went up the hill.

"You got a car up here?" Torky asked.

"Coupla cars," I said.

We come to Dicks' house.

"Inside, Torky," I said.

"No!" he said.

I took him by the shoulder and led him into the house.

I watched Lena. Her eyes went to his in a flash.

He had been trembling a little, but I felt him grow quiet under my hand.

Simpson nudged me and when I turned he led me to the door.

"I get you, Mr. Tom Hill," he said. "You know Lena killed Dicks. You think her father knows it. Swell play! I'll back you to the limit."

"The limit won't be much," I said.

"You *are* a detective," he told me.

"You'd be surprised," said I.

CHAPTER VI.

CONFESSION

MY BACK had been to the people in the room, of course, but I had been listening with both ears and my ears conform to the general bigness of my body. I heard somebody move slowly across the room.

I turned around slow, so it wouldn't look as if I was suspicious. Torky had gone over to Lena, and they was talking together.

I could see that they was trying to make it look as if they wasn't talking about anything in particular, but both of them being excitable people, they wasn't making a very good job of it.

When Lena saw that I had my eye on them, she give her father a nudge and he straightened up and moved away from her.

"Well, Torky," I said, "I have got you in my net at last. It has taken a long time, but you are caught. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"What about?" he asked.

I leaned forward and bored him with my eyes.

"About the murder of Dicks," I said.

I thought maybe I would take him off his guard, but he only give a laugh.

"Where are them two men I was playing cards with?" he asked.

"Outside, I expect."

"Have 'em in, Mr. Tom Hill."

I had 'em in. They was a couple of roustabouts that I didn't know. I

supposed their reputations wasn't none too good, or they wouldn't have been hanging around Torky's; but still I expect they would have a hearing in a court of law.

"Men," said Torky, pompous, "where have I been all night? Tell Mr. Tom Hill all about it."

He folded his hands on his paunch and looked around at the men. I still had my eyes on Lena, and I saw her kind of glow.

"Well," said one of the men, "we went to Mr. Torquatus's store at three o'clock this afternoon. We stayed there till supper time.

"He invited us up to his house to have a bite. We were here mebbe three-quarters of an hour.

"Then we went back to the store. Business was kind of dull and we played cards. Long about midnight, Mr. Torquatus said we would have to go up to his house for a minute. We——"

"To get some liquor," I suggested.

"Exactly," said Torky. "You have got me there, Mr. Tom Hill, so there is no use in arguin' about it."

"We came down the hill," the man went on. "We didn't see anything unusual about this place. It was all dark.

"We went on to Mr. Torquatus's house and got that and then we went back to the store."

"Torky hasn't been in this house before tonight?" I asked.

"Not for one minute. I can swear to that."

"He has been with you all the time?"

"Yes, sir."

LENA was not only glowing, she was grinning now. She looked meaner than she had looked at any time tonight.

"It's an alibi, Mr. Tom Hill," Tommy Horton said. "There is a small matter that I would like to call to your attention.

"While you were away, I talked to Wentworth here. I pointed out to him that the truth would serve him best in this jam. He came through.

"While he was down at the railroad bridge tonight, he was worrying. You can make out of that what you will."

"What was he worrying about?" I asked.

"Financial matters," Tommy shot at me.

Wentworth jumped to his feet.

"You have tricked me," he yelled. "You pretended to be my friend just to get me to talk."

"I make my living by listening to people talk," Tommy said, cold.

"You young pup!"

"There, there, Wentworth," I broke in. "Keep cool. What was his financial troubles, Tommy?"

"Usual stunt. He had worked all his life and had saved some money. He wasn't satisfied with that. He wanted to get a wad all of a sudden.

"Slick oil agent came along and got him to invest in a new company to work in the Oklahoma fields. Wentworth fell. Put in all his savings. Mortgaged his house to the handle. He is busted, ruined."

"The man had papers that proved that a lot of prominent people were in the company," Wentworth said.

"Old stuff," said I. "That agent come to see me without knowing I was town marshal and I gave him till the next bus to go some place else."

"Well," said Tommy, "Wentworth needed money and Dicks had it."

I saw what was on Tommy's mind. He is a bright boy and he had a notion that I was getting the net kind of tight around Lena.

He was ready to move heaven and earth to save her, guilty or not. Such is love!

"Wentworth didn't kill Dicks, Tom-

my," I said. "He isn't the killing kind. I have knowed him for a long time. He has always been a hard-working man."

"But he was in a jam," said Tommy.

"I have knowed him too long," said I, stubborn.

"Your child-like faith in people again," Tommy sneered.

"After sixty-five years of living, it's about all I've got, Tommy," I said.

Tommy snorted. Great night for snorting, this. I turned to Lena. I was about to ask her a question when Stanley came through the door, bringing Janet along at his side.

Janet had on the black dress all right, and above it her face was white. Great night for white faces, too.

As soon as Janet was in the room, the eyes of the two girls smashed head-on.

Lena's eyes were wide and bright, and there was a sneer on her lips.

Janet's head was up. She was very dignified. Seemed to me she was having the better of the encounter.

I was surprised that I had ever thought that Lena in comparison to Janet was good-looking.

Though Janet was pale, she still kept her beauty. It didn't desert her just because her color was gone. Her reddish-gold hair shone in the lamplight.

"Janet," I said, "tell us about tonight: just what you did, just what Stanley did."

She told the same story Stanley had told, and she convinced me, if I had needed any convincing.

"What does it amount to?" Lena asked, coming forward. "She and Stanley have been together practically ever since the murder. Why shouldn't they tell the same story?"

"That's a fact," I said. "Janet, did you and Stanley talk this matter over?"

"We did," she said. "We compared notes."

"Janet!" said Stanley, putting his hand on hers.

"Oh, let's have the truth, Stanley," she said. "I wish I hadn't run away.

"I should have stayed here and told my story to Mr. Tom Hill. He would have believed me; he believes me now."

STILL with my eyes on Lena's face, I shook my head, slow. I hated to make that play, but I felt that I had to. Things were warming up, and I had to take advantage of every little matter that come my way.

"It looks sort of bad, Janet," I said. "You have no witnesses."

"I have Stanley," she flared at me.

"You're engaged to marry Stanley, ain't you?"

"Why, yes. I'm going to wait for him till he comes out of the navy.

"He's going to study electricity this time. He will be an electrical engineer later on."

I had sat down to ease my bulk, and Janet came up close to me. She was between me and the others for a minute.

I let my left eyelid droop, and Janet smiled just a little. She took her cue prompt.

"I tried to be friends with this girl," she said, "and now I understand she practically accuses me of murder. I demand to know where she spent her evening."

"I was at home when my father and these men came to the house," Lena laughed. "Oh, you can't put anything on me, girl."

"Janet," I said, "much as it hurts me, I am afraid I shall have to hold you for this murder. I want to talk to you."

I rose and went outside and she followed me.

"I'm trusting you, Mr. Tom Hill," said said, rapid, "but don't you think this is going a little too far? Why, people will always say that I was arrested on a murder charge."

"I said I would have to hold you," I told her. "I haven't held you yet.

"You just keep a stiff upper lip and leave things to me. Can't you see how Lena hates you? She would swear your life away if she could."

"She hates me on account of Stanley," Janet said.

"Exactly! I have knowed it all along. Besides, she wanted money. Torky never gave her none and he wouldn't let her work. Made her keep house for him.

"I happen to know that she got a job at the Mercantile a while back and he let her stay there one day."

"You think she killed Dicks?" Janet asked.

"Never mind what I think, Janet," I said. "You just play the game."

WE WENT back into the house. I took a look at Stanley then.

That boy was facing the music something fine.

His head was up in the air, and he was smiling. When he caught my eye, he smiled more broad.

"That lad has got something up his sleeve," I said to myself.

"You are holding me, Mr. Tom Hill?" Janet asked.

"I must."

"We can go to jail together, Miss Wentworth," Torky broke in.

"Miss Wentworth isn't going to jail," said I. "She is going home. I am going to let her father take care of her tonight."

"Why, Mr. Tom Hill," Simpson broke in, "the place for her is at the county jail."

"Opinions differ on so many things they might differ on that," said I.

"Funniest way of handling prisoners ever I saw," he said.

"WELL, folks," I said, "I expect this clears everything up. Nobody is held but Miss Wentworth and Torky—Torky on the liquor charge, of course."

"Can I make bail here, Mr. Tom Hill?" Torky asked. "I have the money at the house."

"On the other hand, you can't make bail at all, Torky," I said. "It's going to morning right now. You will rest in jail till I can take you before the justice."

"But——" he said.

"No 'buts,'" said I. "I have spent too much time landing you to let you get away, Torky. Well, Wentworth, take your daughter home."

I thought Janet made a nice little play then, but I didn't know what the result of it would be. She walked up to her father kind of tottery and put her head on his shoulder.

Her own shoulders shook like she was sobbing. I saw that Lena was satisfied with the way things were going. She was all content.

THEN Stanley came to bat. He was as cool as a hunk of ice as he turned to me. I thought he was going to make some kind of a remark. What he said brought me up standing.

"It is silly to accuse Miss Wentworth, Mr. Tom Hill," the boy said. "Of course all the world, or a part of it, knows you are a great detective. You have solved several things since you have been marshal.

"But in this case you are away off your trolley. I told you I needed money, didn't I? Well, I did.

"I didn't just need it in the ordinary way. I had to have a bunch of it. That's why I came home.

"I knew my father had a hoard. I thought he would stake me. He wouldn't.

"I made up my mind to rob him. I left Janet outside the house to estab-

lish an alibi for me. The alibi seems to have blown up.

"I didn't go back to the river when I left Janet. I came in here through the back door. I thought my father was in bed. Instead he was sitting at this table in the dark.

"I ran into him. We grappled. I stabbed him. I am the murderer, Mr. Tom Hill."

Well, that shook me clean to my foundation. For a minute at any rate. Gradually I come to.

"That's a lot of bunk, Stanley," I said.

"I have the money," he said, cold.

"Where is it?"

"I will need a lawyer," he said. "Lawyers are expensive."

"You've got that money hidden?" I asked.

"Maybe."

ALL this had come rapid fire. As Stanley stopped speaking, Janet moaned.

Lena screamed so that I expect she was heard a mile or two down the river. That was the difference between them two girls.

Lena got her voice first, for speaking purposes.

"No, no!" she said. "No, no, Stanley!"

"You see what you have done, Lena?" I asked, stern.

She only looked at me, piteous, swallowing hard. Janet drew herself up.

"Of course this is ridiculous," she said. "Stanley didn't kill his father. He went down to the river to look for my vanity case. He was halfway down the hill when I heard the first moan."

"You saw him go down there on this dark night?" I asked.

"I did!"

"If I was you, Janet, I wouldn't talk no more," I told her.

"I tell you I came through that back door and killed my father," Stanley said. "This frees Janet, doesn't it, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Certainly," I said.

"You had better go home, Janet," he said.

She passed close to me on her way out, her father following.

"All right?" she whispered.

"As rain," I told her.

I looked at Lena. She was shivering and quivering.

"Y-y-you don't want me any more, do you, Mr. Tom Hill?" she asked.

"Go home and go to bed, Lena," I told her.

Pretty tottery, she went out the front door.

"Sheriff," said I, brisk, "look after these people for a few minutes, will you? There is a small matter I have forgotten."

I started for the back door. Tommy Morton made a break for the front.

"Get that boy," I ordered. "Keep him here."

Simpson grabbed Tommy and pulled him back.

"Why, Mr. Tom Hill," Simpson asked, "do you think this young whelp was in on this thing?"

"Stranger things have happened," said I, and I plunged out into the dark and made a beeline for Torky's house.

CHAPTER VII.

"HOPELESS, HOPELESS."

THERE was no light in Torky's house and that confirmed me in the suspicion that had come to me.

Whether she was going to bed or whether she was going to do something else, I had known that Lena was going home.

I had an idea that she was going to bed.

By now the night had begun to

creep away. The darkness had lifted quite a little. I knowed that if I looked over my shoulder I could just about see the river and the railroad bridge.

But I didn't look over my shoulder. I stood back from Torky's house under a tree and waited.

Lena couldn't leave by the front door or the back without me seeing her.

She come presently, out the front door. She had taken a leaf out of Janet's book.

She had put on a very dark dress and had throwed a dark cape over her shoulders. She had on a little black hat, though far as darkness was concerned she wouldn't have needed that; her hair was black enough.

I had never seen Lena timid before, but she had a timid minute now. She stood stock still after she had come down the two steps that led from the door.

She looked every which way, even back at the door that she had just come through. Her glance come toward me last and that give me a chance to tiptoe toward her without her seeing me or hearing me.

When she turned her head in my direction, I was so close that I just put out a hand and laid it on her arm. She tried to pull away. I knowed she was ready to dart, swift as any swallow. She was a strong girl, but not so strong as me even at my age.

I certainly didn't want to hurt her, but I had to dig my fingers into her arm to hold her. I didn't find no soft woman's flesh on that arm. It was pretty near as hard as Stanley's.

Lena always kept her house spick and span, and the housework had built up her muscle.

"Lena, child," I said, gentle, "don't struggle. I've got to keep you. Quit trying to get away from me."

I thought she would struggle all the harder, but she didn't. She stopped all of a sudden and swayed up to me.

I put an arm around her and she leaned against my shoulder. Spite of her pulling away from me and the excitement that must have been running through her, she seemed hardly to be breathing.

"You all right?" I asked, thinking she might have gone under at last.

She nodded, not trusting her voice to speak, I expect.

"Let's go into your house and set down," I said.

SHE straightened up and started for the house. I noticed that she kept one hand under her cape, and I didn't have to guess any too hard to know why.

When we got into the room, she set down on the far side of the table, expecting me, I suppose, to set down across from her, so the table would be between us.

I didn't do that. I followed her and stood in front of her.

"Let me have it, Lena," I said, quiet.

"Have what?" she asked, but her tone didn't convince me none; it was all kind of wavery.

"What you have under your cape," I said.

Well, in spite of what she had tried to pull off on Janet, Lena still had quite a lot of sporting blood in her veins.

She looked up at me, and she smiled. I expect what they nowadays call the come-hither look was in her eyes. She was quite a beauty again.

"I have my hand under my cape, Mr. Tom Hill," she said. "Are you asking permission to hold my hand?"

"Time goes on and on," I said, grave. "It never does turn back. I haven't lost no forty years to-night.

"If I had—well, Lena, you have fell down on what you were trying to do.

The thing now is for you to try to make amends."

"To that girl?" she sneered.

"To that girl," I said, stern. "She is a good girl, Lena. Lots of ways you are a good girl. But I expect you have been having a brain storm because of your love for Stanley Dicks."

"Love for Stan——" she began, trying to be hard, but failing so that she couldn't finish her sentence.

"Oh, Mr. Tom Hill," she said, very low.

Her eyes filled with tears, but she kept her head up. She wouldn't bow her head, and she wasn't afraid to let me see the tears.

I tell you, men, I was a good bit shaken. I wished that Simpson had this job, but of course he wouldn't have knowed how to do it.

I don't mean by that that I am clever. I mean that Simpson is just the other way, too much so.

"Hopeless, hopeless, Mr. Tom Hill," Lena breathed.

"Hopeless, yes," said I. "Hopeless from the start. You will have to forget it, Lena. You will have to get a new hold on life somehow."

She fumbled out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

"I am only trying to help Stanley," she said. "He mustn't suffer for this. He is only sacrificing himself for that girl."

"I know it," I said, "but the trouble with young chumps like Stanley is that they will go through with a thing like this.

"You see, Lena, people love different. You loved Stanley after your own fashion. That fashion was to get Stanley for yourself.

"You got a lot of emotions in you, Lena. When they begin to whirl, your reason takes a vacation.

"Stanley and Janet are different folks. They love, but they ain't got your itch for possession. Their love leads out into strange places. Either one of them would die for the other.

"Folks like them kind of lose themselves when they fall in love. They think only of the other."

"I know what you mean," Lena said, "but it isn't in me. I have never had anything. That father of mine—the selfish brute."

"You have drawed too much inside yourself," I told her. "You could have a lot of friends in this town if you wouldn't be so high and mighty. Why, I know a nice young fellow that is in love with you."

"With me?"

"With you. Tommy Morton."

"That newspaperman?"

"Him."

"Why, I never looked at him twice."

"I know it, but he would jump in the river for you. He is a good boy, too, smart as a whip.

"Royal Selden says he will make his mark in the newspaper world, the writing world. Royal says he throws a wicked pencil. I think he will make his mark, too, if he doesn't smoke himself to death."

"Well, what is all this leading to, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Give me Dicks money, Lena."

SHE sat very still, then, looking down. The lamp light, thinning now against the growing light of the morning, fell on her slick black head. It brought a kind of a bluish tinge to her hair.

Her color was not as high as usual. It was softer. She really was a nicer girl in this minute than she had ever been before.

At last she drew her hand out from beneath her cape. It held an oblong leather case.

"Dicks' money is all here, is it?" I asked.

"All there," she said. "In big bills."

"That's what you and your father

was whispering about. Well, what's the story, Lena?"

"Dicks always liked me," she said.

"Immortal John Henry," I said to myself, "is there no end to the liking and the disliking in this thing?"

I had a minute in which I stood thinking. Gosh, I had been up and down this Buckeye Street maybe a thousand times, and I had never liked the place.

I had been out on this bluff a great many times and had stood looking down at the river and the railroad with its bridge.

I had often wondered why anybody lived here or up the street. It had always struck me as a drab kind of a place.

I hadn't seen anything unusual in the people here either, and yet all the time one drama and another was being played, under cover. I expect it is like that all over the world. You never can tell what is being covered up by people's bows and smiles and idle talk.

Here was a number of people all drawed one to the other in different ways, in spite of age and ugliness, beauty and youth.

Dreams! Bad dreams, good dreams! I expect a man goes dreaming to his death. If death means peace it must be a relief for some folks.

"Dicks always liked you," I prompted Lena, for she was kind of far away herself just then, lost in some kind of a dream, I expect.

"He wanted me to run away with him. He said he had money, hidden. He said he had never spent any. He had made quite a good deal by his work, and he had mortgages and things besides the money.

"He said he would spend it on me. I just laughed at him.

"One night, when everybody was away he come over here and he had this fold with him. He opened it and showed me the big bills.

"I knew then that he kept it in the house as he said, and my guess was that he had it in the attic."

She lifted her head up still further so she could look right into my eyes.

"You spoke of people loving in different ways, Mr. Tom Hill," she said.

"You think that I can love only in one way and that it is not a very good way. Well, I'll show you.

"You go down there and release Stanley Dicks. Release that—that—Miss Wentworth. Let her take him home with her. Let her get breakfast for him. Let her serve him."

There was a little catch in her voice, but she killed it and went on, fairly even:

"Let her serve him, but, oh, she will never serve him as I would have done. I would have worked my fingers to the bone for him.

"When he came home and I saw him, I thought—no, I didn't think. I just felt! It seemed as if life had begun all over again. He smiled at me."

"He would," I said. "He is a good boy."

"I understand now," she said. "I didn't then.

"It made me wild when he began to step out with Miss Wentworth. I could have killed her. I could have killed anybody.

"Well, he used to go down to my father's store to buy fruit for her. Seems he will talk to anybody and he talked to father.

"Father asked him all about the navy. He told him, and it came out that he was short of money.

"I asked father about him. I could get anything out of father without rousing his suspicions if I went about it right. I had no money, but I thought if I had some I could buy clothes and attract Stanley. I would have some money left and Stanley and I could go away on it.

"I see now that that was silly. I

see he isn't that kind. But I tell you I was wild; I was crazy, I guess.

"So I got that stiletto of my father's—Miss Wentworth did return it—and I went over. It was dark in the house. I ran into Dicks and——"

"You ran into Dicks just the way Stanley said he did," I suggested. "Ain't you borrowing part of your story, Lena?"

"It happened that way," she said, but she didn't look at me.

"He seized me in his arms. I think he thought I had come to see him.

"I had the knife in my hand and I struck out at him. I struck out at him several times. He fell.

"I heard voices outside, and I ran out the back door. Stanley, who was really going down to the river, nearly saw me.

"When he had gone, I started over here. I saw that girl out in front. Dicks must have groaned, and she ran inside. I came home.

"Then I made up my story. I—I wanted to get her out of the way.

"Oh, Mr. Tom Hill, try to make Stanley understand what I am doing for him. He will have to remember me then, a little, won't he?"

"You killed Dicks in a fit of jealousy, did you, Lena?"

"Well, and for the money. I didn't mean to kill him.

"The house was dark, I tell you, and I thought he would be asleep. I knew Stanley wasn't at home. I had seen him and that girl go away.

"I wanted him, Mr. Tom Hill. I haven't been myself since he came home."

HER hands was folded in her lap now, and she sat looking down at them. I looked at them, too. They was strong, long-fingered hands. They could have handled that stiletto just as Lena had said they handled it.

Lena was very still once more, and now so was I. I am a patient man in a crisis. Living had taught me how to wait.

I don't know how long it was before Lena's eyelids began to flutter. She fought against looking up at me, but my eyes seemed to draw hers as a magnet draws metal.

My eyes must have been kind of sad, for that is the way I felt. I expect there was some reproach in them, too. Also there was praise of her.

She had gone down to the depths in her accusation of Janet, but somehow she was up on the heights now in her willingness to give herself for Stanley just because she thought Stanley was in danger.

In addition there was something else in my eyes. As she looked into them, I tried to sweep everything else out of them and make that one thing strong. It was unbelief.

"Why, Mr. Tom Hill," said Lena with a little gasp, "you don't believe me?"

I shook my head, not speaking.

"You are going to let Stanley go to the chair?"

Again I shook my head.

"What are you going to do?" she cried. "What do you know, Mr. Tom Hill? What have you found out?

"They say you have solved several mysteries. They say you just blunder along till you arrive somewhere.

"Where have you arrived now, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Stanley didn't kill Dicks," said I. "Of course Janet didn't kill him. Wentworth didn't.

"There have been pointers in the direction of all you people, but they wasn't pointers that led me off the main trail.

"Folks say I blunder along, do they? Mebbe I do, but as I blunder I keep my eyes open.

"I have been watchin', tonight, Lena—watchin', watchin'—watchin' each and everyone of you.

"It was easy to put Stanley and Janet and Wentworth out of this thing. It wasn't so easy to put you out.

"You are strange. You run deep. No man could tell from day to day what you would do, especially if you had set your heart on something.

"Lena, look out for them deep places in you from now on. They will either make you or ruin you."

"Never mind me," she said. "Who killed Dicks?"

"Your father, of course," I said. "Why, that greasy old scoundrel would kill anybody or do anything else for a dollar and a half.

"He isn't a man, Lena. He's a dirty beast, and when he pays for killing Dicks you will be well rid of him. Didn't he kill Dicks, Lena?"

She thought for a while, her hands still folded, her eyes going beyond me.

"He will kill me for telling," she said. "He told me tonight he would kill me. But I don't know as it matters, Mr. Tom Hill."

"It matters," I said. "It matters to me. I am your friend, Lena. I will look after you. Me and Tommy Morton will look after you. Tell me just what your father did."

"WE HAD a furious quarrel one night," she said. "You know, Mr. Tom Hill, I have no self-control. When I lose my temper—well, I am all gone.

"I had asked my father for a miserable ten dollars. He wouldn't give it to me. I told him there was a man who would give it to me—and more. He laughed.

"I told him about Dicks and Dicks' money then. He gave me the ten dollars.

"I should have known what he had in his mind, but it never occurred to me. He had those two men in his store all afternoon and evening.

"I saw Stanley and Janet go away before dark, and I sat out on the doorstep waiting for them to come back.

"I—I wanted to see them, just to see them. I—I wanted to see him kiss her good-night, as I knew he would do.

"I—I could have killed her any time in the last two weeks, Mr. Tom Hill. I am surprised that I didn't.

"While I sat there, I saw three men come down the hill. I knew they were father and those two other men. I thought they were coming for whisky.

"You can find ten gallons of whisky in the cellar here any time you want to, Mr. Tom Hill.

"Well, father stopped in front of Dicks'. One of the men went to one corner of the house and one to the other. Father disappeared inside.

"Why, he wasn't gone five minutes, while I sat here sort of frozen. He came out and he and the men hurried up the hill.

"I didn't know what to do. I had to have time to think. I couldn't think.

"I knew father had at least robbed Dicks. Perhaps he had killed him.

"While I was trying to think, Stanley and that girl came. He left her in front of the Dicks house. I suppose he went after her vanity case as he said.

"While he was gone, she suddenly darted into the house. All the rest you know.

"That is your murder mystery, Mr. Tom Hill. How did you suspect my father?"

"It was a question of melding," I said.

"You come on over to Dicks' now, Lena. I won't let your father hurt you. He will never have another free minute. Me and Tommy Morton will look after you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEST PLAYER

I GAVE her a little while to get herself together. I talked to her as gentle as I could.

I tried to make her understand that she would be riding to a fall if she kept on letting her angry passions rule her. I pointed out that she had some good in her and that if she would let it grow she could make something of herself.

"If you want a job in the Mercantile, I will get it for you," I said. "I own some stock in that company. I will help you to get more of an education than you got.

"You get acquainted with this Tommy Morton. He is a good boy, but he is burning himself up with cigarettes and late hours and—well, he thinks the world and all of you, Lena. I just found it out tonight. You could help him."

"I could help him—help anybody?" she asked, and all of a sudden she seemed like a woman.

"You could," I said.

She looked around the room as if she was bidding it good-by.

I had an idea it had been a kind of a prison to her. She had been filled with longings. Life had got her all mixed up.

I wasn't fooling myself none about the job I was tackling in trying to make her over, but I was willing to take a shot at it.

"Well, what now?" she asked, and got up.

"You will tell your story in front of your father?" I asked.

"I will," she said, but she shivered.

"Come on, then," said I.

I EXPECT coming events *do* cast their shadows before. At any rate, we stepped into Dicks' room amid an intense silence.

I forgot to say that while we was down at Torky's place, the undertaker had come and got Dicks' body, and while me and Lena had been away Janet had been tidying up the room.

She has a gift for tidying things up, that girl. The room wasn't as oppressive as it had been. There was only that expectancy among the people there.

Me and Lena stepped inside and stood just within the door for a minute. I looked them all over, slow, and at last my eyes went to Torky.

He stood my look for a minute and then he shifted on his feet and his eyes went down.

Beside me, Lena caught her breath. I felt her move away from me, and I knew that she had gone over to stand by Tommy Morton.

I don't say she was attracted to Tommy all of a sudden. Only, I expect, she wanted to be near somebody of her own age.

And she knew Tommy was her friend. I had convinced her of that.

"Well, Mr. Tom Hill," said Simpson, "how about it? Have we got the details all cleared up? That's all that remained when you left here."

"There is a detail or so still remaining," I said. "We will work them out slow and easy.

"It is near breakfast time, but we won't hurry account of a meal. It's getting so I only take coffee and toast for my own breakfast, anyway."

I stopped and they all was silent. That was what I wanted—silence for a time, silence that would let a few folks I knew get to wondering and from wondering pass to uneasiness.

When I thought the silence had lasted long enough, I broke it without no preliminary cough or movement.

"Torky," I said, "what is double pinochle worth?"

He lifted his head at such a foolish question and stared at me.

"Double pinochle?" he asked.

"Double pinochle. The two queens of spades and the two jacks of diamonds."

"Why, eight," he said.

"How long you been playing pinochle, Torky?"

"Years. Long as I can remember, pretty near."

"Not much of a player, are you?"

The pinochle bug will get a man as hard as the poker bug—harder, I sometimes think.

You get a bunch of pinochle players together, and they will tell you about their melds and what died in their hands and how many tricks they took and all about it. I had touched Torky where he kept his pride.

"I will take on any man in this town," he said. "I will bet him any amount he likes."

Every eye in the room was on me now. I won't say I wasn't getting a little thrill out of it, as the young folks say nowadays. I am human, even if I do just blunder along, as the folks seem to think.

"Torky," I said, "you have always been mighty careful about the liquor you kept in your store. Tonight you wasn't careful at all. That made me a little suspicious at first. It was just a pointer, however.

"The big pointer—the hand that pointed conclusively—come in the pinochle game."

"I don't know what you mean," said Torky, uneasy.

"Torky, what would you think of a man that had double pinochle staring him in the face and didn't meld it? What would you think of a man that would discard one of his jacks out of double pinochle?"

"Dumb-bell," said Torky, prompt.

"Not necessarily," said I.

I bored him with my eyes then. I bored him hard.

"He might have something on his mind, Torky," I said. "He might have something so big on his mind that a pinochle game, pinochle bug though he had, wouldn't be anything to him. What say, Torky?"

Torky's face went gray. The grease on it seemed to stand out more plainly.

I let him stew in it for a minute. I turned to his two companions.

"WHO ARE you two fellows?" I asked. "If you don't know it, I am the town marshal and this is the sheriff with his deputy. Who are you?"

"We come in off a boat this morning," they said.

"You've never made this town before," I told them.

They shifted on their feet, looked down, glanced sideways at each other.

"Friend of Torky's sent us on here from Cleveland," one of them said.

"You are in an awful jam," said I.

"How's that?" the spokesman asked, surly.

"I can arrest you for assisting in a murder."

Ashy looks come into their faces.

"We wasn't in on no murder," the fellow said.

"Tell us what you was in on, then."

They hesitated. I had been holding Dicks' billfold under my coat.

Now I took it out and tossed in on the table. Torky's eyes bulged as he looked at it.

"Found it over at your house, Torky," I said.

"I don't know nothing about it," he said, feeble.

I turned on them two other fellows hard.

"How about you?" I snapped. "Come clean and fast.

"I think you was on robbery bent only, when you come down here with Torky and stood on guard, one at each corner of the house, but maybe you don't know that when robbery results in murder, every man in on the robbery is as guilty of murder as the man who actually commits it."

Well, they come scrambling in out of the wet like the rats I had knowed them to be.

"That was it, that was it," said the wordy one.

"We just come to rob Dicks. Torky killed him. We didn't have a hand in it."

"You'll stick by that story?" I asked.

"Abs'lutely."

"Simpson," I said, "you can take the three of them over to your jail.

"Tommy, you give Simpson a good w[illegible]e-up in your paper on this thing. Will you?"

"I'll let him in," said Tommy, indifferent.

Simpson took the three of them away, him and Craig herding them along as if they had done all the work. Tommy turned around to Lena.

"May I take you home, Miss Torquatus?" he asked, with a little bow.

SHE looked Tommy over, much as a mother would look over a small boy who had been playing in the mud. Of course, I couldn't tell what would come of this thing.

I didn't know what show Tommy would have with her. I didn't know that it would ever bring him any happiness if he got her. She would have to change a lot.

However, as a general rule I believe in letting things take their natural course. They will take their natural course anyhow.

I didn't know if there was any special value in Lena's look at Tommy, either.

I have read about the maternal instinct welling up in a woman. Maybe it welled up in Lena. Maybe it didn't. Maybe she didn't have any such instinct. Anyhow she said:

"You smoke too many cigarettes and sleep too little, don't you?"

"I can quit smoking," said Tommy.

"About sleep I don't know. I am of a restless nature. I don't need much sleep."

With that they started for the door.

"I will try not to call you against your father, Lena," I said.

"I will see if the county prosecutor can get a conviction without your help. I'll let you know."

Her lips went tight as she thought of what was coming to her father, but she went on with Tommy with her head up.

I TURNED to Stanley. He was looking at me with his eyes half-closed and a thin smile on his lips.

"Well, Mr. Tom Hill," he said, "nobody has congratulated you yet. Let me be the first. You certainly figured things down to a fine point on the basis of that pinochle game."

"Comes of being a good pinochle player myself," I said.

"And having a good pair of eyes and a good head on your shoulders."

"And being able to blunder along," said I. "Soon as I saw Torky let that double pinochle slip I knew he had something serious on his mind.

"If he had something on his mind, it was about himself. That hard old boy never give a thought to anyone else in his life. So I decided to make my play along that line.

"But, boy, you pretty near balled things up. You would have put the fat in the fire if Lena had stuck to her story of having killed Dicks herself.

"When a woman gets the self-sacrifice bug, you never can tell what she will do.

"Lena has been a little off her trolley ever since you came home and maybe before, through one thing and another.

"That self-sacrifice bug got you, level-headed as you are. If it could

get you, how do you think it would get an excitable girl like Lena?"

"How do you mean it got me?" he asked.

"Why, when you thought Janet was in danger, you stepped in and offered yourself."

Stanley laughed and I had to smile, it was such a good, wholesome laugh.

"Mr. Tom Hill," he said, "you are good, but you do muff the ball once in a while. Did you really believe that I thought you suspected Janet? Not any!

"I knew you were making a play of some kind. Why, you have known Janet all her life. You don't get off on the wrong foot about people. I can see that. You are too square yourself."

"What was your idea, then?"

"I knew you were bluffing," he said, "but I had to take care of Janet. I couldn't let her pose as a murderess for one minute.

"I've got to take care of her, Mr. Tom Hill. I have always got to take care of her.

"I'm not much, but what I am belongs to her. She honors me every time she even looks at me, Mr. Tom Hill. I have to take care of her in big things and little."

HE STOOD there, drawed up, his eyes shining. I wouldn't, in that minute, have needed more than one-tenth of one guess to decide what was the greatest thing in the world.

"Where do you go from here?" I asked.

"Over to Janet's. I think she will have breakfast ready. Come?"

"I think Wentworth will keep out of your way," I said. "I wouldn't add myself to company to make a crowd for anything. Besides, I like my own coffee."

"I'll be seeing you, Mr. Tom Hill," he said, and he went out, brisk.

I was left alone in the Dicks house, but I might as well have been anywhere else.

I sat down and fell into a kind of dream about Janet and Stanley. I had had a hard night. It would have been a hard night even for a younger man than me, but I wasn't specially tired.

In big things and little Stanley was going to take care of Janet. That didn't mean that she would be a clinging vine. They would get on together, them two young folks.

What Stanley had said about Janet had made me feel as if a soft, sweet breeze had begun to blow where there had been evil in the air.

Even now they would be alone over at Janet's. There would be gentleness and kindness between them.

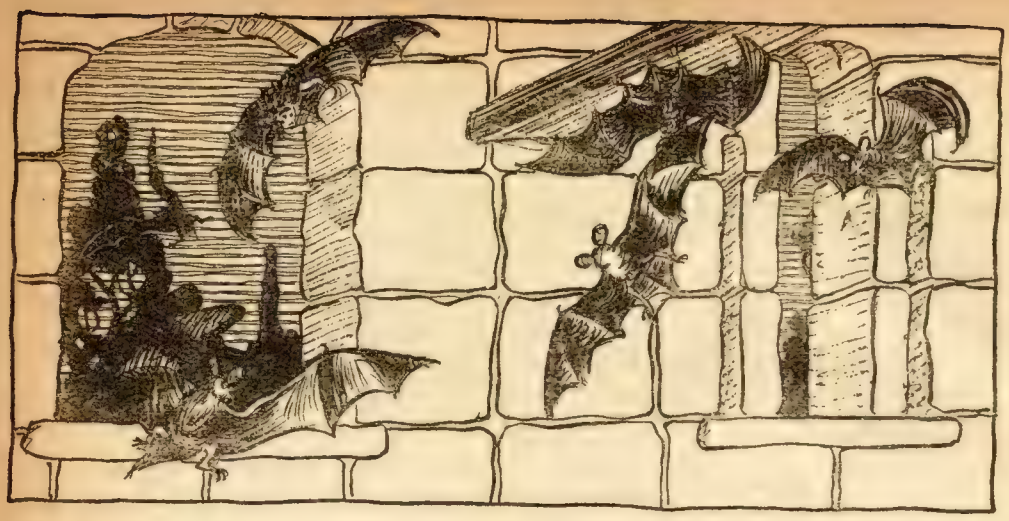
I have talked a good deal to Tommy Morton and Royal Selden, the editor of Tommy's paper, about the writing game. They know about books. I don't.

From what they have told me I gather that people that write would find more in Lena than in Janet.

Maybe so. Maybe so.

But as I wended my homeward way I was thinking of Janet with her red-gold hair and her cool eyes. Thought of her gave me a restful, peaceful kind of a feeling.

(THE END)



No. 12a

By
HERBERT ADAMS

HADRIAN PERCIVAL POTTS was superstitious. He believed—nay, he had proved by bitter experience that there were countless malign influences in his life that worked in a mysterious way to thwart his endeavors and frustrate his desires.

If he had a bet on Giggling Girlie, did not a cross-eyed man meet him in the street and so give the race to Son of Thunder?

If he was to go for a picnic, did not a blackbird fly in at his window to bring a change in the weather and make him forget his flask?

Mr. Potts considered that he was unlucky—and that in spite of his constant endeavor to avoid doing anything that should bring misfortune upon him.

Those who walk under ladders or sit down thirteen at table deserve the cruel buffets of fate. He did not do these things and yet the Fates were not kind to him.

He rose each Friday morning with fear and never started any enterprise on that dreadful day. If the thirteenth of the month fell on a Friday he hardly stirred from his house before nightfall.

He was careful to pick up every pin he saw and if he thought he had inadvertently passed a black hairpin he would go back and search for it, lest its evil influence should wreak some subtle vengeance on him.

If he perceived a feather in his path he would carefully plant it upright in the soil, for that is known to bring luck—and yet the luck came not.

On the day he lost his job downtown he had been too late to stop his wife from opening her umbrella inside the house.

Yes, he had a wife, and she declared it was a sunshade and that she must see if it went with her new frock—what could a man expect if he had a wife like that?

He not only had a wife, but he had two children. That could not be

counted as ill-luck, and yet the two had arrived together, which had certainly complicated matters when arrangements had only been made for the reception of one.

He once took his wife for a walk in the country and they saw a magpie —surely the most certain harbinger of woe—and he kept the little woman trudging wearily on for mile after mile in the hope of seeing a second magpie, for all the world knows that whereas one means misery, two bring joy.

At last they did espy another of the fateful breed. But he went home with a quaking heart for possibly he had not seen two, but only the same one twice — and that must mean double trouble. Later that week the twins had measles.

Dressing in the morning was to Hadrian Percival a serious proceeding. Everyone knows that if a garment is donned incorrectly, a vest put on inside-out, it insures a day's happiness for its wearer. But the mistake must be inadvertent.

Hadrian longed to make such a mistake, but his anxiety to err kept him so conscious of what he was doing that he could not go wrong. Yet there were moments when hope ran high.

"Martha!" he would cry, as he put on his boots after breakfast. Martha was his wife. Martha Potts is a steady respectable name and his wife was a steady respectable woman.

"Martha! I believe I've put my left sock on my right foot. Come and see!"

And Martha, deserting the twins or the kitchen, would bend carefully over the extended feet and after a careful examination of the toes and the well-darned heels she would pronounce her verdict.

"Yes, Hadrian, they are wrong."

"Hurrah! I never knew it!" He would kiss her and hurry forth to put more than usual on the horse he fancied for the second race — for Hadrian Potts, as has already been hinted, was addicted to betting.

"Martha," he would say reproachfully on his return at night. "My socks were *not* wrong. Blue Pill was beaten by a short head."

And in time Martha, who was often anxious about socks and other things for the twins, learned that it was wiser to declare that their father in putting on his clothes had made no mistakes.

THEN there came a change in their lives. Hadrian had an uncle Gabriel. Now, Gabriel Potts was not superstitious. He was a hard, straight man, very matter-of-fact, and he had no sympathy whatever with what he called the finicky folly of his nephew.

The difference in their natures will be realized when it is stated that Uncle Gabriel lived in Glenniker Terrace in a popular South-East suburb, and his dwelling place was Number Thirteen.

To Hadrian it was always something of a trial to call on his uncle, for who would stay in a house Number 13 and not expect to pay for it in some way or other?

One evening he spent two hours there and the next morning Martha had an awful boil on her neck. Some people do not believe in these things, but you cannot get away from facts.

Gabriel found sardonic pleasure in inviting Hadrian to visit him, but the nephew's susceptibilities at last brought about an estrangement between them.

Gabriel dined in the good old-fashioned way at one o'clock. He liked punctuality and he liked food. One day he asked Hadrian to dinner. It was at a time when the twins developed whooping-cough and Martha could not leave them.

What exactly caused their illness

no one knew, but Hadrian could remember when his wife had crossed the knives, spilled the salt and cracked a mirror, all in one morning.

One o'clock arrived but the nephew did not. Half-past one struck and still the old man was kept waiting. It was not until twenty minutes to two that the hapless Hadrian appeared and his excuse to his fuming relative was received with positive rudeness.

He had been, it seemed, already a little late when he approached Glenniker Terrace. Just before he got there he had to cross a broad roadway, and as he had been about to do this, his progress had been stopped by a funeral procession.

Even the most thoughtless are perturbed when their path is crossed by a funeral, and Hadrian Potts did what any right-minded person would have done under those circumstances. He had retraced his steps so that his pathway might be utterly and entirely different.

This prudent action had necessitated his going back much farther than he had expected and eventually he had reached his uncle's residence from an entirely different quarter. It had made him forty minutes late, but he had escaped a grave peril.

As Gabriel consumed his burnt fish and his sodden mutton he let his nephew know precisely what he thought of him, and the knowledge was in no way comforting. Even Martha failed him when he told her about it.

"It was a great mistake to keep the old gentleman waiting," she said. "You can't tell what you may lose. I really think you sometimes carry things too far."

"You would think that, Martha," he replied bitterly. "If you have no thought for my life and my health, I, at any rate, think of you and the children. To cross a funeral and dine at Number Thirteen! Who knows which of us would suffer? Even now there may be trouble."

Once again, events justified his fears. But it was his Uncle Gabriel who died.

ONE CAN hardly be expected to be heartbroken at the death of a relative who has denounced one as a many-adjectived fool, but Hadrian was sorry about his Uncle Gabriel—he might have lived so much longer if he had not scoffed at the wisdom of the ages.

How will Uncle Gabriel leave his money? This was Martha's practical question, and the answer to it was amazing.

Gabriel Potts left more than was expected and his dispositions closely concerned them.

Shorn of legal phraseology, he bequeathed his freehold house, together with the furniture therein and four hundred pounds a year, to his nephew Hadrian Percival Potts for his life and afterward to his children absolutely; but it was expressly provided that Hadrian Percival Potts should reside in the said freehold house Number 13 Glenniker Terrace for not less than nine months in each year. If he failed to do so, neither Hadrian nor his children would receive anything, and the property would pass to the Ewsbury Lunatic Asylum.

"What an infamous will!" cried Hadrian. "Of course, we'll never live there."

"Why not?" said Martha. "It's a comfortable house, and we and the children are provided for."

"Number Thirteen!" returned her husband gloomily. "Could there ever be comfort, or health, or happiness in such a place?"

"Why not?" repeated his wife sturdily. She had no intention of risking her children's inheritance. "There's a Number Thirteen in every

street and the people are no more unlucky than anyone else."

"How do you know that? I could tell you scores of instances to the contrary. Only last week there was a bus accident. Four people were killed and one of them lived at a number thirteen."

"The others didn't," retorted Martha. "We'll soon get used to it."

Hadrian knew he was fighting a losing battle. No doubt he meant to lose, for he was not blind to the advantages of a freehold house and four hundred pounds a year, but if things went wrong for him it would be comforting to be able to say she made him do it.

Then he had a happy thought. He called on old Gabriel's solicitor, who was also one of the trustees.

"It's quite clear, isn't it," he asked, "that I must live at 13 Glenniker Terrace?"

"Quite clear," said the solicitor, "unless you renounce the legacy."

"But," said Hadrian, "if I live there, there's nothing to prevent my calling it 12a instead of 13?"

The solicitor looked at him gravely for a few moments. He then put on his large horn-rimmed spectacles and read the will carefully through. That done, he took down two ponderous law books and studied several pages. He then read the will again.

"No," he said at last, "provided you occupy the hereditament in question you do not become dispossessed if the numbering should change. Nor, so far as I can see, if you yourself change the number from 13 to 12a."

"Good!" cried Hadrian. "I'll bet Uncle Gabriel never thought of that?"

And so it came to pass that when some of the furniture had been renovated, peacock feathers burnt, and the rooms decorated in lucky colors, Hadrian, Martha, and the twins and their b l a c k cat (which deserved earlier mention) duly took possession of 12a Glenniker Terrace.

DID FORTUNE smile on them, or did retribution punish their temerity? That is a question on which opinions differ.

Martha was happy in her placid way. She was proud of her home and kept it as spotless as circumstances and the twins permitted. In place of her previous uncertain fraction of 'Daily help' shared with two neighbors, she rejoiced in the possession of her own Domestic.

This Domestic had a shattering way with plates and dishes. She often proved that "hard as iron" is a foolish phrase, seeing that saucepans fell to pieces in her hands, or developed cracks when she left them for a moment on the fire. But as Mrs. Potts remarked, she was no worse than other girls and it was a blessing to have her.

The twins grew and prospered. They tore their clothes, cut their knees, and occasionally they lost themselves. They had chicken-pox, sore throats and many varieties of rash.

Their father noted gloomily each ill and trouble that befell them, but their mother declared they were healthier, happier and better-looking than any other children in the street, and their mother no doubt knew. Certainly they benefited by their regular meals and the sure supply of warm clothing.

And Hadrian Percival Potts himself? That is where the difficulty lay. Now that he had a safe income he set aside two pounds a week to bet with. He was confident that, with decent luck, those dollars would in most weeks gather many other dollars.

Yet that did not happen. His luck was dead out. Ever since he had moved into 12a Glenniker Terrace he had been betting steadily and he had been as steadily losing. If that was not due to the evil influences of the house, to what could it be ascribed?

He took every conceivable care. He

studied form and pedigree. He never overlooked portents.

On returning home one day he found Martha at the foot of the stairs with a sprained ankle. She had fallen over the black cat. Without a moment's hesitation he dashed out again and backed Faltering Filly; but it finished last.

When the Domestic smashed the soup tureen, it not only cost him the price of a new one, but the further pound he promptly put on Broken China at 25 to 1.

If a sporting paper announced that its Tipster had actually predicted a winner (an event worth recording in capitals) Hadrian bought that paper and followed its advice for weeks.

But fortune always eluded him. The horse he backed to win never got nearer than second, while if he was on it "both ways" it either failed to finish the course or got a place at a price so short as still to leave him out of pocket.

He admitted he had never been really lucky in racing, but unless there was some deep reason for it no one could have had such persistent misfortune as dogged his steps since he inherited his uncle's house.

ONE DAY he met an old friend, a friend he had not seen since his change of address, and to him he confided his woes. This friend, Toddy Burton to his intimates, knew much about horses and, what is perhaps even more valuable, he knew a good deal about jockeys and stable-hands. He listened with polite regret to Hadrian's troubles.

"Absolutely," said the disappointed man. "I haven't been on a single winner since I moved into that blessed Number Thirteen. Believe it or not, but there it is."

"I yeard about it," said Toddy. "Y'r runcle's 'ouse? Nice 'ouse; I've been there. Good ole sport, y'r runcle. But o' course thirteen *is* unlucky."

"Unlucky isn't the word," declared Hadrian. "It's uncanny."

"Well, look 'ere," said Toddy after a pause, deciding to be generous. "Let's see if we can't break the spell. What might you be fancyin' for the Great Bingleton Stakes on Wednesday?"

"Galloping Fairy."

"Um—yes—Gallopin' Fairy. It's a good 'orse."

"What do you mean, Toddy? Do you *know* something?"

"Maybe I do—maybe I don't." Toddy spat thoughtfully into the world at large. "If I do—and mind yer I don't say I do—it's the real goods and something big."

"What is it, Toddy, old man? Tell a pal what it is."

"It's like this. I yeard a rumor. I b'lieve it's true but I shan't know for sure till the day o' the race. Something kep' very dark—specially for Bingleton. If it's O. K. I'll send a wire and *you can put the bank on it.*"

"Thanks, Toddy, thanks! I will."

A grip of the hand and they parted, Toddy to pursue his normal activities and Hadrian to wait with such patience as he could muster until the day of the big race.

AT LAST that day came. Hadrian knew that Toddy would not let him down. Of course, the "good thing" might not be for Bingleton at all. The owner and the trainer and the big ones behind the great game might decide to hold it back for something else. One could never tell. But, if it was all right, Toddy would hear of it and Toddy would let him know.

The morning wore away slowly but auspiciously. Martha had no mishaps, the Domestic broke no dishes, the Twins were in perfect health. Hadrian stopped at home to

be at hand when Toddy's telegram arrived. The race was at three and provided his own wire went off ten to three he knew he would be "on."

By lunch time he had sent for all the sporting papers and although horses were suggested as likely to win—Galloping Fairy among them—there was no rumor of any sudden change in the betting.

The "big thing" had been well managed, and no hint of it had leaked out to enlighten the public and shorten the price. But what—*what*—*what* could it be?

JOHNNY EVANS was a boy of average intelligence — no more and no less. He had done fairly well at the State school and he had secured a post to deliver telegrams in a certain suburb of South-East London.

Johnny was not a loiterer nor was he a hustler. He went steadily on life's way doing his duty and not thinking too much about it. He had often heard thought reprimanded. "I thought"—a boy would begin. "Did you?" his superior would interject. "Then don't do it again—I do the thinking; you do what you are told."

Johnny was handed a colored envelope that had been hastily inscribed "Potts, 13 Glenniker Terrace," and, knowing nothing of its contents, he strolled at a fair regulation pace to take it to its destination. He had not been long in the service and as it happened he had never before been sent to Glenniker Terrace. He was told where it was and he had no difficulty in finding it.

The first number he saw as he looked up at the houses was No. 2—No. 1 was entered round the corner. He walked on a little way and, looking up again, saw No. 8.

He proceeded with his eyes open for all the interesting things about him and found himself opposite to No. 12. The next house was 12a, and when he passed that he found No. 14.

Something at once told Johnnie that this was one of those streets where the odd numbers were on one side and the even numbers on the other. He therefore crossed the road.

It was an advantage of Glenniker Terrace that it faced a recreation ground. So when Johnnie Evans crossed the road he found he had to walk a considerable way before he came to any more houses.

He strolled gently past the recreation ground, for it was a pleasing change from the long rows of area railings, and as he neared its end he saw two boys fighting. Johnnie was human and one of the boys was an acquaintance.

His arrival brought about a temporary cessation of hostilities while the cause of battle was explained. Explanation led to recrimination, and the fight was resumed with greater earnestness than before. It was a tough battle and Johnnie adopted a thoroughly impartial and sporting attitude.

Other passers-by stopped to watch; a small crowd gathered and applauded; a lady declared that they ought to be ashamed of themselves; the belligerents were parted, and Johnnie went on his way.

Beyond the recreation ground was a church, and beyond the church were houses again. But those houses were not Glenniker Terrace, they were Jordan Terrace. That was puzzling, and Johnnie waited a while until a dustman who was chatting affectionately with a cook had leisure to attend to him.

"Glenniker Terrace—other side—lower down," said the amorous scavenger curtly.

Johnnie pensively retraced his steps. The church clock said five min-

utes to three. He would get some tea at four unless he were sent out again.

He reached Glenniker Terrace—14, 12a, 12—there was no 13. What was he to do? Potts — someone might know the name.

"HAVE you a telegram for me?"

An anxious face appeared from 12a, and an eager hand clutched the envelope.

"Potts—yes, I'm Potts," and Hadrian's fingers trembled as they unfolded the belated slip. It contained his name and address and two words:

"Harlequin, Toddy."

And the church clock struck three. It was too late!

"Why didn't you get here before?" he cried in a frenzy to the boy.

"'Ow could I?" retorted Johnnie. "It says 13 and there ain't no 13—I've been all along there looking for 13," and he pointed far down the road. With a curse Hadrian slammed the door.

The evening paper (6:30 edition on sale soon after 4) announced that the Great Bingleton Stakes had been won by Harlequin at forty to one. Hadrian told Martha all about it, and she was naturally very sorry.

"But," she added, "isn't it a pity we didn't trust to luck and stick to 13?"

Water Superstitions

Water spilled will bring rain. Take no pay for a drink of water or the time will come when you will cry aloud in agony for a few drops of it. Throw stones into a well and you will raise a storm.

Before crossing water after dark, spit three times on the ground to avert the evil power of spirits and witches. These last will not cross running water.

Part from a friend beside a bridge and you are saying farewell for ever. Drop a pin in a well and you will have good luck.

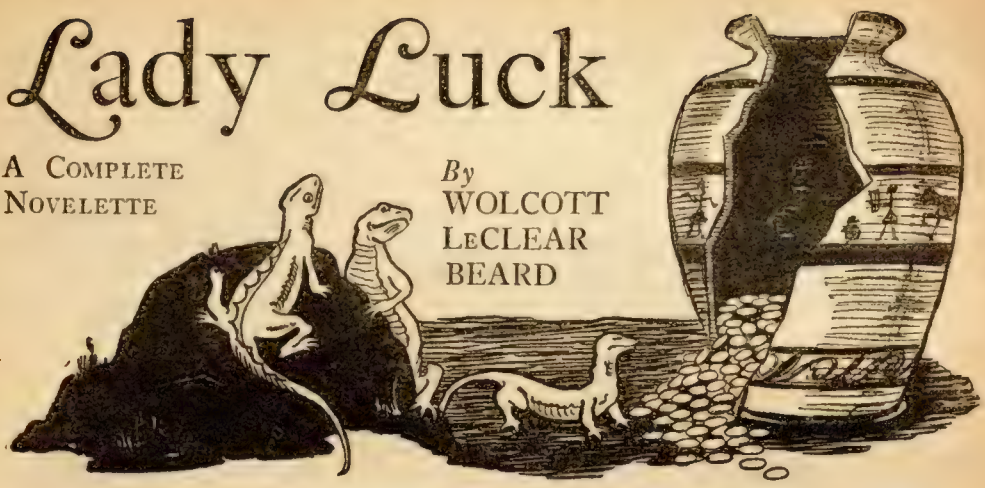
If bitten by a poisonouus snake, leap across water, even a puddle, before the snake is out of sight. Do this and the venom will be harmless. A drowned man floats face downward, a woman's body faces up.

If, when you are fishing, you count your catch, you'll have no more fish that day.

Lady Luck

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By WOLCOTT LeCLEAR BEARD



Do our lives follow a predestined course or is everything just a matter of chance—of luck? Wolcott LeClear Beard indicates an answer to this universal question in LADY LUCK. What do you think?

A GAMBLER sitting alone on a bench in Bryant Park at two o'clock of a bleak morning in early winter—that's me at the present moment. The picture I present probably could be run in an evangelical weekly over some such caption as "The Way of the Transgressor is Hard," if it weren't for the fact that I'm wearing a fur-lined coat which keeps me very comfortably warm.

I'm here because I volunteered to watch that house—the one just opposite this bench, there on Fortieth Street. It hasn't any outer locks, nor any outer doors worth mentioning either, for that matter. Naturally I'm supposed to be inside, but I hate dumps like that one. Always did.

Besides, something happened there that got the bearings of my think-machinery all heated up from undue friction, so I came here into the fresh air trying once more to figure it out, though I know I won't reach any fresh conclusion. I doubt if there's any fresh conclusion to reach.

I grabbed a pad of Butch Callahan's fake letter-heads and brought it along, thinking that it might help if I set down the whole story as I know it, from barrier to wire. But maybe it isn't really a story, come to think of it. More like a saga, perhaps.

In either case, however, it needs a name, so I'll call it "Lady Luck." It's a title that works both ways, like a good rule.

Probably the phrase was borrowed from darky crap-shooters, but that's of no consequence; it's used now by gamblers of all sorts to typify certain occurrences which they can't explain. Occurrences that will break every mathematical law of chance into more pieces than you could find in the axe-splintered front doors of that house I'm watching.

I don't believe there's a man or woman alive who can't recollect such occurrences. To call them "coinci-

dences" is to talk simple tommyrot; they're far too frequent and too extraordinary to be explained in any such way. Parsons attribute them to the interposition of some power higher than ourselves, and they have the correct idea; I'm sure of that.

And I'm not the only gambler who holds that belief. Practically all of 'em do. But the belief is called "superstition" when held by gamblers.

I'M A typical New Yorker: I came originally from a hick town. This story, or saga, or whatever one chooses to call it, begins in that town.

It opens like a play—like pretty much any one of those old-home plays you ever saw. Its cast could be duplicated in almost any town of old New England.

At the head of that cast was Adelaide Lucton, who had christened herself "Lady Luck" when she was so young that she couldn't pronounce her own name. And the babyish nickname stuck, as such nicknames so often do.

Then there was Jimmy Elliott. It's natural to couple his name with hers. They had been sweethearts all their lives, and were to be married as soon as Jimmy was through college.

There was Judge Hitchcock's son Andy, the villain of the piece. He was a born short-card sport, a piker if there ever was one—a hypocrite and a coward. But he also was cunning; his camouflage was good.

Even in our little town he generally passed unquestioned for a muscular young Christian—a healthy, hearty lad whose devotion to the religion of his fathers was one of the finest of many fine traits in his sterling character.

Finally, there was Letty Smith. Her mother had died when Letty was too young to know. After her father also died, when she was eighteen, she wouldn't accept help from us, and tried to support herself by sewing. Her father had been one of my father's bartenders.

For my father owned saloons—three of them—prosperous ones. That's the reason why, when Jimmy Elliott and Andy Hitchcock went to Harvard, I went also; my father was determined to give me all that any boy had.

He did his best, but nothing could change my status very greatly so far as that town was concerned, as any New Yorker from rural New England will understand. So I had no part in the drama performed by these others. I was the onlooker who, proverbially, sees most of the game.

Letty of course did have a part in that drama, but her case wasn't parallel to mine. She was a girl, and in her quiet, mouse-like way, a pretty girl. There wasn't a soul on earth to protect or even advise her. She was, in short, the safest game for a piker like Andy Hitchcock that it's possible to imagine, and he wasn't the sort to overlook such a bet.

It was the old story. Her child died, but her disgrace didn't. And disgrace of that sort in such a town *is* disgrace—the real thing!

Andy's connection with the affair—mind that!—was never dreamed of then. Letty paid the whole price. She existed as best she could—the less said about that the better, perhaps—and suffered in silence.

She'd have gone to her death rather than say a word that could hurt Andy. She loved the beast. Loved him as Heloise loved Abelard, who was a swine with a nature so like Andy's that if it wasn't for the centuries between them, they might have been spawned in the same litter.

JIMMY ELLIOTT, Andy Hitchcock and I returned to college for our senior year on the same train. They al-

ways were cordial to me, but we weren't friends. There wasn't any snobbishness in this fact. I wasn't their kind—hadn't their background—that's all. Exactly as though I'd been a foreigner or something.

So those two traveled together, while I was simply an old acquaintance who happened also to be a fellow-passenger. When we reached Cambridge they were joined by some men I didn't know, so I lingered and let the bunch go on ahead.

It was then that I saw Letty for the first time since her smash. She didn't see me. She was lurking around a corner, and vanished as soon as she made sure that Andy had come. For he was the one that she looked at, and it was then that I began to suspect him—knowing him as I did. But I kept my mouth shut. It was suspicion only.

At the time Letty's furtiveness led me to doubt if Andy had any part in bringing her to Cambridge. And afterward that doubt became a moral certainty. He hadn't enough imagination to foresee the use he could make of her presence there, but he was plenty cunning enough to grab the advantage when it came.

The treachery—the unspeakable meanness—meant nothing to him. All that he could reckon was risk, and if the stake were worth it. In this case there was no risk, and the stake was Lady Luck herself. He wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything since the day he was born. So it isn't hard to guess what he decided to do.

It stood like this: Leaving everything else out of the question, Letty was a girl we had known all our lives. And now she was alone among strangers, facing the hardest thing a woman can stack up against. For us three to take some pains to be kind to her was just common decency, and nothing more.

It's true that I showed her no kindness, but that wasn't my fault. She wouldn't have it. We'd been rather fond of each other when we both were kids and probably that was the reason. But her reason doesn't matter. The fact remains that she wouldn't see me.

Andy never went near her, so far as anyone knew, because he was that sort of an individual.

But for Jimmy Elliott to add to Letty's unhappiness by ducking out of her way when they met, or to refuse any help within his power, were things that he couldn't have done if he'd tried—which he didn't. He didn't care a hoot if everybody knew what he did. His motives were clean. It probably never occurred to him that anyone would be interested.

THAT was where Andy's propaganda had the chance to get in its first fine work. I know what he did only by the results, yet I'm just as sure of his methods as though he'd made me his confidant. I know Andy, you see.

So I could almost duplicate the stuff he wrote to various people who would be sure to repeat it to Lady Luck and her mother—for she had no father.

Insinuations! Simple statements, made with apparent regret, that Jimmy had been seen talking again with that poor Letty Smith. Half truths and half implications which made them wholly lies: the hardest of lies to fight and the meanest to tell.

Naturally, as those lies spread from mouth to mouth, they grew out of all recognition, until they were better than new. Every town gossip, unconsciously or otherwise, became an ally of Andy Hitchcock's. Lady Luck must have had a very unhappy time standing up under that bombardment.

But she did stand up. She wouldn't even consent to write and ask Jimmy

for his side of the stories because that would have seemed like doubting him. Which was foolishness, of course, yet rather fine in its way, even so.

This nasty mess at home had been simmering for weeks, but Jimmy was serenely unconscious of its existence. For he was an orphan. Lady Luck was his only home correspondent except his grandfather, old Ewen MacPherson, who probably was as ignorant as Jimmy—and, anyway, Jimmy never bothered to read old Ewen's preachy letters. But the matter had to come to a show-down, and it did.

Pushed to the wall, Lady Luck at last consented to go in person to Cambridge, take Jimmy by surprise and settle the matter once and for all time. She didn't set out alone, of course. Both her mother and Jimmy's grandfather went with her.

Mrs. Lucton was a purring, confiding sort of little woman, but old Ewen's covenanting ancestors didn't have a thing on him. He was as straight as a mathematical line, and as narrow. He was the sort of man that is trusted, greatly "esteemed" and generally disliked. Every town has them.

It was a mistake to bring old Ewen. But for Mrs. Lucton, in the innocence of her heart, to write Andy of their coming was worse than a mistake; it was tragedy. It gave him just the chance he wanted.

It was only tonight—last night, to be accurate—that I learned what Andy's procedure was. Even now I don't know all the details, but I heard enough so that I could fill in a gap that has puzzled me for years.

It seems that his father, Judge Hitchcock, was the winning card that Andy had played in his first game with Letty. He couldn't marry Letty while his father lived. The old man was in feeble health. Anything that reflected upon the character of his only son would inevitably bring his carefully curled toupee in sorrow to the grave—that sort of stuff.

Now he played that card again. He told Letty that Jimmy, having discovered that he, Andy, was the cause of her disgrace, had sworn to go to Judge Hitchcock with the whole story unless they were married at once. He wouldn't believe Andy when the latter explained why that couldn't be done at that time. But he'd believe Letty.

So she must go—at a time that was carefully specified—to Jimmy's rooms and get him to promise to drop out of the game. But she mustn't mention Andy by name. One never could tell who might be listening; and if any hint of the facts became known he, Andy, couldn't stand it. He'd kill himself.

SO LETTY did as she was told—of course—and Andy attended to the rest. Therefore, when Lady Luck, with her mother and old Ewen MacPherson, reached Jimmy's rooms, they found his door ajar—he had left it so for propriety's sake—and impassioned pleadings in a feminine voice coming from within. Then one of the three, Jimmy's grandfather, I suppose, pushed the door open.

So there they were! Letty, frantically pleading, with tears streaming down her cheeks. Jimmy, with his hand on her shoulder, trying to stop her stream of words long enough to discover what under heaven she was talking about. The two white-faced women and the sour old man breaking so suddenly in.

It might have been a great scene, on the stage. As things were, it was worse than death to some of the actors—to all of them, maybe.

For a second the tableau held. That I've been told. Then, with a little cry of dismay, Letty bolted from the room.

Her flight was a clincher, if one was needed. It looked like guilt, and Jimmy couldn't explain it—couldn't explain anything. How could he, when he himself hadn't a notion what it all meant?

So Jimmy was tried, convicted and sentenced, then and there. The sentence was poverty and exile. Poverty, in that his grandfather cast him off like the heavy father in a melodrama; exile from all he had known and cared for. He couldn't stay in college. He had no home to go to. So he just vanished.

After this episode, I learned, Andy tried to avoid seeing Letty, and for a time succeeded. She was of no further use to him. When they meet, it was for the last time but one in their lives.

He tried to make sure that it would be the very last time, for he told her —and meant what he said—that if she tried to see or speak to him again, he would have her arrested as a disreputable woman who was trying to blackmail him.

Shortly afterward Andy's engagement to Lady Luck was announced. He had caught her on the rebound, as it were. They were married very soon.

That was the beginning of Letty's end—and of Jimmy's also, as it seemed.

So Jimmy and Letty went their different ways, for many years never to be seen by anyone who had known them. What those ways were I don't know, except that they both led downward.

I imagine that at first Jimmy offered some resistance to this descent—he had done nothing to lose his self-respect—so that Letty, having nothing to restrain her, reached the bottom first. But eventually they both struck the skids of life that are greased by drugs and drink. The descent is always swift after that.

STILL, things were working out, as they usually do work out, in directions we least expect. In England there once lived a guy—I forget which one—who wrote poetry. He got soused, and in a fit of next-morning remorse was struck by a rather good idea, which he resolved to act upon. So he chartered a cab in order to reach the Thames, in which he could drown himself.

But the cabby, it seemed, knew the poet by sight, and instead of driving to the river took him back to his lodgings. Whereupon the guy was moved to write some verses in which occurs the line: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

It's true that the incident seems hardly important enough to inspire the line. What induced the cabby to butt in and spoil things was probably the fact that the lodgings were more distant than the river, so he could claim more fare. But nevertheless the line formulates a great truth.

And another truth, likewise in tabloid form, is expressed in the saying that the great Architect of the Universe sometimes chooses strange tools wherewith to effect His works. You may call that architect by any name: God, the Primal Cause, the Cosmic Law, or whatever you choose, and it will make no difference. For it isn't a question of religion, but of fact—and fact remains unchanged.

Who would ever have thought, for example, that Butch Callahan would ever be selected as the instrument of an all-wise providence? Butch doesn't know it; he's in jail, and likely to stay there until I can get him out.

Yet that he was so selected is a thing of which I haven't the faintest doubt. But Butch needs explaining, and I'm getting ahead of my story.

I was graduated with my class. Why I drifted into gambling as a profession has nothing to do with this

tale. But I did drift into it and many things, not in the curriculum, that I learned at college helped me to become a very good gambler; and my early entrance into politics enabled me to become a successful one, which isn't always the same thing. I shall retire soon.

This took years, of course; enough of them to bring me from a college boy to a middle-aged man. But they haven't hit me so very hard. I haven't had much to worry me—not even my conscience, such as it is, because never in my life have I played a brace game against a square player.

But those years dealt very differently with three of the four I've been writing about.

Andy was the only one who was happy and contented—as much so, that is, as he could ever be. He had attained his ends. He had married Lady Luck—the name was a sad misnomer now—and was rich, and growing richer, thanks to her money which had started him. So what more did he want?

The unhappiness of other people, even though one of those people was his own wife, wouldn't bother him.

I HEARD only indirectly and at long intervals of Andy and Lady Luck. Of the others I had no knowledge whatever until I saw them again. A lot of water had run under the bridge before that time came.

When at last it did come it was through Butch Callahan; and that, to my mind, is the strangest thing about it all.

Like Letty's father, Butch Callahan had been one of my father's bartenders. From behind the bar Butch drifted into pool-rooms—fake ones, for choice—wire-tapping games, and things of that sort. He did so well in the tall-grass districts that he came here to break with a splash into the big time.

Never, of course, was I very chummy with Butch. I don't at all admire his line of business and he's not, to make a very mild statement, of the type that recommends itself socially to me.

But he was a tie, the only tie remaining, that connected me with my boyhood and my old home. No matter how unsentimental we consider ourselves, it would be hard to disregard a tie like that, even if one wanted to—which I didn't.

It's true that in manners, mind and morals, in a general way, Butch is a fifty-fifty split between a thug and a con-man. Yet, for all that, there are a whole lot of mightily decent things concealed about him.

Such a combination isn't nearly as strange as it may seem. In fact, though some people will find it hard to believe, it's quite common.

Butch argued, correctly enough, that it's just as easy to trim a rich sucker as to take small change from a poor one, but his personality wasn't just the kind which would enable him properly to establish himself in the vicinity of Main Street, Gotham. Therefore I took some trouble to help him, for old times' sake, arranging matters with the police and so on, before making my annual semi-vacation trip to the southern resorts.

Now, as Butch was recommended and vouched for by me, the cops would have been wise to treat him decently. But I was away. The precinct captain, always inclined to be cocky, became greedy as well, and raised the assessments to be paid by Butch for protection far beyond the limits agreed upon.

This was sheer, bad faith, and Butch's refusals to pay were couched in personal language calculated to raise blisters on that police-captain's fireproof soul.

Trouble ensued which I, on my return, tried to smooth away. Conse-

quently I went to Butch's joint far more often than I otherwise would have done. It was then that the things—things which had no connection with Butch's business affairs—happened as they did.

THE KNOB of the front door rattled as a hand was laid upon it the moment I rang the bell for the first time. Naturally I supposed that the door was to be opened in order to let me in, but instead a man let himself out, and blundered into me as he came.

I was annoyed. I didn't want to be in that place and I was in a very ill humor, so I exclaimed rather impatiently. Instantly the man turned, and for the first time I saw how old and feeble he was as he made me a tremulous but courtly bow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he. "My eyes aren't what they were, and coming from comparative darkness into this light dazzled them so that I failed to see you."

He bowed again, and went precariously down the steps, helped by the hand-rail, leaving me astonished and a little ashamed of myself. I hadn't expected an apology, and certainly not such an apology from such a man. He was so abjectly and evidently down and out to the very last degree.

His hands were twitching owing to shattered nerves, and his knees seemed barely able to bear the weight even of that thin, hollow-chested body. His hair, which couldn't have been cut for months, straggled in white elf-locks from under his battered hat. His eyes were bloodshot, his face sagged and wrinkled.

Yet, what hit me hardest about that face wasn't the wrinkles nor the unshaven scrub of beard, or any such thing. It was the expression it wore. It's difficult to put a look like that into words; one can't describe such misery.

It was like the face of a man who, while still in this world, is damned so utterly, so hopelessly, that his soul is benumbed so that it can no longer feel anything except its own degradation.

The sight of tragic faces lost its novelty for me long ago, but this one made me feel queer—gave me the creeps. Honestly! And I felt queerer still because there was something in that courteous, quavering voice which was vaguely reminiscent of one that I had heard before, but for the life of me I couldn't tell when nor where. But I didn't have time to do much thinking just then.

The man hardly had turned away when Butch, who was expecting me, came to the door himself in response to my ring. He dragged me into a little room that he used for an office of sorts, and before I had time to speak answered the question in my mind, then leaned back in his chair and defiantly waited for the information to sink in.

It sank. I wouldn't have thought it possible to shock me as I was shocked then. Always I had prided myself upon the fact that I never forget a face, but this was no blow to that pride. Most certainly I never had seen *that* face before. Yet, Butch told me, what I had seen was all that remained of Jimmy Eliott.

Now, the Jimmy I knew was a year younger than I. The man I had seen might, from his appearance, have been any age over seventy. Try to imagine the contrast between that utter derelict and the physically fit, perfectly groomed college boy that I remembered. I couldn't, unless I had seen. I could hardly believe it even then.

"That guy's down an' out," continued Butch. "Don't yuh s'pose he knows it? Don't yuh s'pose he'd shy

at seein' a bird what he used ter know before he has a chance to come back a little ways? That's the reason I pull you inter the house so quick—for fear he might turn back, or somethin', an' give you the once-over good.

"Me he ain't reco'nizin'. He never did know me much an' now his lamps is on the blink besides, so there ain't a chance. Anyhow, I don't count; he works for me."

Butch became more defiant than ever as he went on, and sullen, also. I could tell by the way he lighted a cigar. I knew that it was simply because he was ashamed of the kindness he had shown, for fear he might be ridiculed as a soft and easy mark. And, besides, he was normally a rather taciturn person.

So I knew that the logical result of this fear would be to make him shut up like a clam if I asked questions. So I didn't ask any; just sat tight and said nothing. That made him uneasy and therefore, after fidgeting for a little, he opened up of his own accord. Lots of minds function in that way, I've found.

"I find him one night over there," he growled, with a wag of his head toward Bryant Park, where I'm sitting now. "On a bench. Can't sleep; he's broke, and his yen for dope is sendin' him cuckoo. He's throwin' a fit er the jumpin' Willies, and a cop starts to pinch him. Before the bull sees me I devil's-horn him an' stake him to a poke in the jaw. He goes by-by."

THIS was the natural end of a paragraph, and Butch paused, having imparted considerable food for further thought. That "devil's-horning"—poking two stiff fingers into an opponent's eyes in order temporarily to blind him—really is rather a ghastly proceeding.

Butch probably had acted so quickly that he wasn't recognized, but even so there aren't many men in this vicinity who are likely to deal knockout punches to minions of the law for no apparent reason, so that he was pretty sure to be strongly suspected.

I began to discern a possible cause for his trouble with the police. I wanted to know more, and my policy of masterly silence seemed the best way of finding out. So I stuck to it, and presently was rewarded again.

"Say!" he began. "I ain't never kidded meself that I know how to act like them silk-stockin' birds with the open-front vests what hang out 'round here. But it's up to me to know. So I hires Jimmy Elliott to learn me. And he does it. Ain't you noticed that I'm talkin' a lot better grammar than I used to could?"

I nodded assent—heaven forgive me! Butch went on:

"I'm creditin' him with pretty good wages—and he's worth it—but I'm givin' him only a little, and holdin' out the rest. So's he can get a little dope—what he haster have—and save to get himself some glad rags. See?"

I saw. At the same time it occurred to me that in making work for a down-and-out gentleman instead of offering alms, and thus helping him to regain his self-respect, Butch showed an innate delicacy of feeling that neither "them silk-stockin' birds" nor anyone else could have bettered very much.

I oughtn't to have been surprised at this; I'd met similar phenomena so many times before. But I was surprised, though I had the deep discernment not to say so.

Therefore I simply nodded again, maintaining my best poker face, so that no suspicion of ridicule might be aroused. The silence worked once more.

"Jimmy says," Butch continued, "that he's a-gonter ditch the dope for fair. He won't, prob'ly. Most likely

he can't. Anyhow, it ain't often they do. But he is a-cuttin' down on it, and if he gets dolled up a little, it'll help him.

"If he meets u p then with that Andy Hitchcock—and he's bound to, soon or late—he won't feel so much like a dirty deuce in a new deck."

"Andy Hitchcock!" I repeated. "Is he here in New York?"

"N'York!" scoffed Butch. "Why, he lives nex' door—twixt this an' the Republican Club! Got a bachelor apartment. Him and his wife—Lady Luck, they used to call her—sep'rated more'n a year ago. Didn't you know?"

I hadn't known, I told him. There was very little of late years that I had heard of home-town people. Nevertheless, I was astonished that Lady Luck had been able to put up with Andy at all.

Butch agreed with me. He gave corroboratory details—heaven alone knows how he learned them—of Andy's personal as well as his business life. Also he expressed his opinion of each detail, which perfectly coincided with mine, and did it much better than I could. I lacked Butch's vocabulary.

"But *they* don't know that Andy Hitchcock is anywheres near here, and I don't want 'em to," he was ending, when I interrupted him.

"*They!*" I exclaimed.

BUTCH realized that his tongue had slipped, so he swore again, this time at himself, and in order to gain time, I suppose, went to the door of the little room, opened it and looked out.

Luck was with him, for a police go-between who was carrying on the acrimonious negotiations had just been admitted to the house, so there was no more time for any questions of mine just then.

Still, I really didn't need to ask who "they" were. One of them, of course, was Jimmy Elliott and the other—for it never occurred to me that there could be more than two—was Letty.

I can't tell how I knew it was she. Perhaps the reminder of Andy Hitchcock's existence had brought her name to my mind, perhaps it was simply telepathy, which has so much more to do with our thoughts than most of us realize. Call it a hunch, for that's a word that covers everything. But, anyway, I never doubted it, and never had occasion to.

I hadn't thought of Letty very much in recent years. I preferred not to, if I could help it, for heaven knows that she furnished no memory that I would care to cherish. And now that the memory was forced upon me—well, it hurt.

I thought of the change that had taken place in Jimmy Elliott and never dreaded anything more that the prospect of seeing a similar change in her. It somehow seems worse in a woman—any woman—than in a man.

Therefore I kept away from Butch's joint as long as I decently could, but that wasn't very long. I'd promised to try and help him and I had to make good. But he had to come to my place in order to fetch me, and when he did I asked him about Letty, though I don't know why; I didn't want to. But he couldn't very well refuse to answer.

"I chance to meet up with her when she's pinched," he said, rising to go. "Not rambunctious, y' understand—jus' dead to the worl'. I'm in the stationhouse, on business, when the hurry-up wagon fetches her in, so I go to Jefferson an' pay her fine. I give her a job, a-makin' up me bed an' mendin' me socks. She beds down over on the West Side some'eres.

"I'd give her a flop in my dump, but nothin' doin'! She knows that Jimmy an' you goes there sometimes, an' she wants to duck seein' you till

she has a chance to come back a little, I s'pose. But she can't never come back, though I ain't tellin' her so. Her string is about played."

He left before I could ask him in what way Letty's "string" was so nearly played. Before I saw him again there was no need to ask.

THAT was today. Or yesterday, rather; like many men in my line of work, I've fallen into the habit of reckoning days from noon to noon instead of from one midnight to another.

In the morning, before I was up, one of Butch's sheet-writers came with a message that Butch needed me at once, and as he had sent a message instead of trusting the telephone, I knew that his need must be urgent. So I hustled into my clothes, and rather than wait for my own car, took the subway downtown.

I was walking over from the station when I saw Letty ahead of me, going in the same direction. It was one of the last hours of the four-and-twenty which ordinarily would have found me in the street, so she was going unsuspectingly to her work.

Her back was toward me, of course, and equally of course I didn't know her at first, yet she attracted my attention from the instant I laid eyes on her. She was such a wreck! Though warmly dressed, I could see that her body was hardly more than a skeleton that somehow had managed to keep a loose hold on the breath of life within its bones.

Then she coughed. It seemed to come from the very bottom of whatever remnants of her lungs there were left, and it all but racked her to bits. She had to stop for a second or two and hold on to a lamp-post for support. I hurried forward to offer help, but before I could reach her she had pulled herself together and once more was on her way.

At Fortieth Street she turned eastward and started to cross Sixth Avenue. The traffic, at that moment, wasn't very thick, yet the vehicles were so close together that it would have been utter folly for anyone as weak as she to take a chance by trying to dodge between them, so she waited to let a light truck, southbound, pass.

The truck was still some little distance away. If there had been no reason for lingering, I would have crossed before it without a thought. Almost any man would. One man did.

This man was Andy Hitchcock. He lived in Fortieth Street and had just left home, so there was nothing strange in the meeting, though at the time it startled me.

There was no difficulty in recognizing him; he looked more like himself than he ever had looked before. This was because his youth formerly had served to disguise his nature, I fancy, and now that youth had gone.

HE DIDN'T notice me, but I watched him. He passed the oncoming truck —and it was then I learned that the woman I had been following was Letty. I hadn't had a chance to see her face, but Andy saw it. I know how a man looks when he sees a ghost, for that is what he saw then if ever a man did—a ghost of his past.

Still, it's not likely that it was Letty's reappearance that startled him. Probably he was afraid of a scene which might cause a scandal. I don't know. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that he stopped, his eyes round, and then, with a gasp of dismay, stepped backward exactly in the path of that oncoming truck.

I yelled a warning—I heard other men yell—but we were all too late. Even Letty, who hadn't uttered a sound, was too late as she sprang for-

ward and gripped Andy's overcoat with both hands, and with every ounce of strength in her feeble body tried desperately to pull him out of the way.

But bucking under its emergency brake, its horn screeching uselessly, the truck was actually upon him. Nothing in the world could have saved him then.

I heard something crunch within Andy's body. He was tossed for a full six yards, and would have gone farther still if it hadn't been for an "L" pillar, which stopped him. He rebounded and lay in the street, a motionless huddle of legs and arms and torn clothes stained with crimson and with the greasy mud of city streets.

In the glimpse that I caught, I couldn't tell whether Andy was alive or dead, and I didn't care. For Letty also was thrown. The truck had not hit her directly. Andy's body had acted as a cushion between it and her. But she lay prone and motionless on the asphalt pavement at my feet.

Reaching under her, I laid my hand on her heart. It still was beating, so I gathered her into my arms and lifted her. Many a child would have been heavier than she.

We all know how miraculously a New York crowd will collect, and as I straightened, with Letty's senseless body in my arms, it seemed to me that we were surrounded by staring eyes as far as my own eyesight could reach.

Among the crowd I saw the blue and brass of a policeman making the best of his way toward a corner telephone box. I knew that he was going to call an ambulance, but I hadn't any intention of waiting for it.

The crowd gave way before me as I strode through with Letty in my arms, followed by a trail of morbidly curious fools who stopped only when Butch, who had seen me coming and stood on the steps to meet me, slammed the front door in their faces.

He led the way to his own bedroom, where I laid Letty down as he went to telephone for a doctor. It was then that I had the first chance really to see her face.

I was prepared for a change, of course—and what I saw gave me an actual shock because there was so little change. The face was Letty's face still. Older, of course, than I had known it, and thinner, too.

But whatever marks dissipation or hardships might have left upon it were smoothed away, for the time at least, by the shock, and only sorrow remained. A sorrow that gripped one to see. It gripped even Butch, so that he swore softly, luridly—and quite unconsciously, as well.

THE POLICE emissaries had come and were waiting below, ready for the final negotiations in which, it seemed, I was to act as a sort of umpire between them and Butch. But the doctor also had come, and so we let them wait while he was making his examination. It took quite a while, but I think we both knew what the verdict must be. I did, anyhow.

"Some superficial bruises and a shock," said he. "A shock that wouldn't be in the least dangerous to a person in normal health. But this woman has no strength. She has no lungs that I'm able to discover. It's a miracle that she has lived as long as this. Not even a miracle could keep her going much longer in any case, and as it is the shock——"

He didn't finish his sentence. There was no need—his meaning was plain enough. He wrote a prescription and went away, saying he'd send a trained nurse.

Butch swore again. It was the only way he had of expressing deep feeling, and the doctor's words really got under his skin, which wasn't

nearly as thick as one might think. But he was ashamed of such feeling, as men of his sort usually are, and was in a correspondingly ill humor when we went down to meet the police ambassadors who, on account of the delay, were in a worse humor still.

Therefore they took a very high-and-mighty tone with Butch, who told them in unfettered language that if they weren't suited, they could go. He also told them where they might go.

I wasn't there at the time. I had returned to stay with Letty, in order that she might not be left alone until the nurse came. But I gathered afterward that the emissaries left in a huff, though not for the place which Butch had mentioned.

So I scolded Butch and went to see the precinct captain. His manner didn't please me, and as I told him so, we had words. Then it was I who left in a huff. I didn't intend to put up with that sort of thing, and so went in search of the inspector. But he wasn't in his office, so I was obliged to leave a message and let it go at that.

I WAS trying to make up some of my lost sleep, and had succeeded rather badly, when I heard that Butch's place had been raided. The news came by telephone. I don't know who was on the wire. Butch and all his crew were in jail. So I got my car, did some hurry-up work at Police Headquarters and then hustled back here.

From this bench where I sit it can be seen what the entrance to the house looks like after those cops had finished with it, and that's hardly a sample of what they did to the interior. There was no occasion for that. The captain of the precinct was sore on Butch, it's true, but that's no excuse. They'll have reason to realize that, the next raid they make. I'll see that they do.

Letty, I discovered, was conscious now. Conscious and also alone, for the cops had taken every other living being to the cells, and if the nurse came, they prevented her from entering. So Letty had managed to dress herself, after a fashion, and I found her in the telephone-room. It was as far as she could go.

Probably some explanation is needed in order to show how such a pool-room is managed. I don't know very much about them myself. I never went in for that sort of thing, as I said before.

But the telephone wires, bringing returns from the various tracks, come in through the top of the house. There's a room there, with operators. If the results of those races don't suit the house books they—the results—are held back until, by offering irresistibly attractive odds, the books can be hedged so that the house profit is assured no matter what horse wins.

At least that's how Butch works it, and I fancy that most other dumps of this sort are handled in pretty much the same way. It's an open-and-shut game.

Letty, as I said, was in this room. She was seated in one of the operators' chairs. I wouldn't say she looked ill; she was beyond that. She simply didn't seem real. She suggested a spirit—one that has passed through the depths of hell, to be purified by its fires, but saddened by its miseries as mere earthly creature can never be.

I can honestly disclaim any attempt at verbal pyrotechnics in writing this. I'm just trying to express what I mean—and failing, because it can't be done.

Letty smiled at me when I came in, but showed no surprise. She spoke as though we had parted ten minutes before.

"He's been here," said she.

"'He?" I repeated, stupidly.

"Yes, Andy," she explained. "He's sorry now. He sees and understands. He came to tell me. And then, of course, he had to go. That couldn't be helped."

SHE went on talking and told me many things. I listened, with queer little crinkles running down my backbone. Did I really believe that Andy's disembodied spirit had come to speak with hers, so nearly disembodied? I'm not sure. I believe few things and disbelieve fewer still.

Who can tell what may happen when the veil between this world and the next one is worn almost thin enough to fall apart? I hadn't stopped to think of Andy's fate, but from that moment no doubt of his death ever crossed my mind; that much I'll own up to.

I said nothing—wouldn't have had a chance, even if I'd wanted to, for I saw Letty sway in her seat, then weakly steady herself. I ran back into Butch's bedroom, but I knew better than to take her there.

I'd seen it; and never, since my freshman year, when my rooms at college were "stacked" by some sophomores, have I beheld such a glory hole as that which the police had made in their "search for evidence."

But I found the sheets and blankets and, taking them to the 'phone-room, made a bed of chair cushions and eased Letty down onto it. She had been sitting with her eyes closed. Now she opened them and smiled at me again.

"It was like Lady Luck to come so quickly when they sent for her," said she. "She's there now, but she came too late. Andy's gone. But it's better so. She couldn't have helped him, for nobody but himself can do that, and when he's earned his freedom at last it's not her that he'll seek as she knows, for she'll never lack faith again. She was to have worked out her penance in this life, and now that penance is ended—hers and Jimmy's. Is Jimmy here?"

I shook my head. Letty's face became troubled.

"He ought to be here," she said. "He *must* be here—for his own sake, and hers. Go and see if he hasn't come—please!"

I went, of course. Otherwise she'd excite herself needlessly, which would harm her a lot more than being left alone for a little.

Jimmy, as a matter of fact, was entering the house as I started down the last flight of stairs. It wasn't anywhere near the hour that he was accustomed to call in order to teach Butch the usages of polite society, and I knew that it wasn't and yet—though this didn't occur to me until afterward—I wasn't in the least surprised to see him. Letty had said that he ought to be there—and there he was.

Yet it wasn't the Jimmy I had seen a few days before. For a little I stood watching him—and if ever my heart went out in pity for a human creature, it went out then to him.

BUTCH CALLAHAN had missed his guess on Jimmy—had underestimated him—and it certainly was no wonder! Much of Jimmy's shabbiness had vanished. Some measure of his old self had returned, and with it had returned his self-respect. Consequently his will-power had done what a pugilist is said never to do. It had come back. Instead of reducing his doses of drug little by little, Jimmy had cut the stuff out entirely—suddenly—just like that!

I'd seen dope-fiends who were shy of their drug, and they aren't pleasing sights. But never until then had I seen a man who voluntarily braved the inferno of total and sudden de-

privation of a drug that had become very nearly as necessary as the air he breathed.

Nobody has seen many such cases; hen's teeth are very little more scarce than they. A man with enough backbone to do such a thing generally keeps away from drugs in the first place. Jimmy was a rare exception—poor chap.

Poor chap, indeed! A paroxysm of the "yen" was upon him, and he was fighting it. He tramped along the passage, into what once had been the dining-room, thence to the drawing-room and out into the passage again. Every fibre of his abused body, every nerve and brain-cell was demanding its accustomed poison and backing the demand with torments that left those of the Spanish Inquisition nowhere.

His face twitched like that of a man who is drowning as his lips formed soundless words repeated again and again. His fists were clenched so that the knuckles were white and the palms reddened with blood drawn by the pressed-in nails.

It wasn't a sight to linger over. It was horrible. One so longed to help and knew that no man could possibly help. So I turned and went back upstairs.

Letty still lay on her improvised bed, but now she had raised herself on one elbow, and as I entered she looked up at me. She wasn't smiling now, but on her face was a look that might be seen on the face of a mother as she watches a child toilfully attempting something that it must learn for itself how to do.

"The poor dear!" she said, her eyes wet with sympathy. "He's calling for *her*. She has heard. He'll have his answer soon, and be easier then."

At that she turned her eyes away and gazed downward, as she had been when I came. Yet she didn't seem to see that grimy floor, but to look through it, as though it had been a pool of clear water.

In her mind, as I somehow knew, she saw through it and through the floors under it, down to the one where Jimmy Elliott was fighting out a round of that finish fight with himself.

WHAT did I think? Did I believe that Letty could see through those plank floors and plaster ceilings? Those were the questions I've asked myself, but it's a lot easier to ask than to answer them. I was staggered more than I would have thought, a little while before, that I ever could be.

Yet I rememberd that I had just seen Jimmy, so his portrait therefore was almost as distinct in my mind as though I saw him still. Also I recalled, now that my attention had been drawn to the fact, that the syllables that his lips formed soundlessly were "Lady Luck, Lady Luck, Lady Luck!" endlessly reiterated, as though they were a charm—or a prayer.

This being true, Letty's vision might have been telepathy again—the transference of impressions from one mind to another which now is an acknowledged scientific fact. I was inclined to this rational belief at the time, but even then I wasn't sure and became less so as the seconds slowly passed. I am sure that the crinkles had begun again to run along my spine in increasing numbers. Also I'm reasonably sure that I must have stood there gaping like an utter fool, but that's as far as certainty goes.

Still, there was no one who saw how I looked. Letty's eyes wandered over a short ellipse on the floor, as though they followed Jimmy, whose footsteps I could hear as he tramped through the wrecked house far below us.

I don't know how long this state of affairs lasted. I do know that it

was becoming unendurable when one of the many telephones in the room buzzed so suddenly and unexpectedly that my overstrained nerves made me jump as though somebody had sneaked up behind me and yelled "Boo!" Still, force of habit is strong. Mechanically I picked up the instrument and took the receiver from its hook.

"Hush!" said Letty, before I could speak. "Say nothing! It's not us that he wants. He'll get his answer."

Now, it mustn't be forgotten what those telephones were—mere dummies for the juggling of race returns, which ran from the top of the house to its ground floor, and nowhere else. I myself had allowed this detail wholly to slip my mind for the moment. Letty had warned me to remain silent and, without stopping to reason, I did so. But I didn't take the receiver from my ear. And because she had prepared me to expect Jimmy's voice on the wire I'd have been surprised, I fancy, if I hadn't heard it. But there was nothing to prepare me for the words that he spoke.

"Lake Orchard, one, two, three," he said.

The call brought a wholly unaccustomed lump into my throat and old memories with added keenness to my mind. Never had I used that call, it is true, but I remembered it, with its three consecutive digits, distinctly enough. It was the 'phone of Lady Luck's house, back in the old town and the old days. I saw that Jimmy's nerves must have driven him into a semi-delirium which, for the time, had abolished those long, intervening years. I gave an involuntary grunt of commiseration.

"Hush!" ordered Letty in a hissing whisper, and I obeyed—but I kept the receiver to my ear.

There was a pause, as there formerly would have been while the leisurely central telephone operative of our home town plugged in the call. Then those twisted nerves of Jimmy's —they or something else—apparently made him think that the call had been answered.

"Is that you, dear?" he asked, with a little catch in his voice; then paused and after a second went on: "Yes—yes, it's Jimmy speaking. I've come back, Lady Luck. Come back for you. Will you meet me? You will? Now? Good! I'll be there."

HE HUNG up the receiver. His footsteps, sounding again, were brisk; they had a definite purpose now. I ran down the stairs and never paused, though I heard Letty call to me.

But I felt that I couldn't allow Jimmy, because his nerve-crazed mind had fooled him with that imaginary telephone message, to go wandering alone over the town and fetch up, as like as not, in the psychopathic ward of Bellevue. And there was no time to stop and explain; he'd had too great a start.

Yet I needn't have feared his start. He was out on the sidewalk before I could reach the front door, but there he stopped. A taxicab was drawn up at the curb, and he stood staring at its empty interior, his face all puzzled and dazed with pitiful disappointment.

I was going to run down and try to jolly him into returning with me — but I didn't. I gasped like a landed fish instead, for there was Lady Luck herself going down the steps of that house next-door.

Down the steps of Andy's house, where she had arrived too late, just as Letty said—and how in blazes could Letty know? Once more those crinkles went down my back like intermittent lights in the border of an electric sign; yet somehow, at the same time, there was a queer, subconscious feeling that I saw nothing

more than I had expected to see all along.

I stood and watched, all senses tuned high. In the glimpse that I got of her tired face, and in the droop of her slender figure, it seemed as though I could see in epitome her memories of those wretched years, revived by the sight of that dead man that she was leaving behind her.

She didn't see me. At first she saw nothing, I think, except those pictures in her mind. Then her eyes fell upon that wreck of a man, doddering and dawdling uncertainly there below: It was a wonderful thing:

ONE HEARS of faces that are lighted by smiles and accepts the well-worn phrase for what it usually is; a descriptive trope. But in this case it was different. It seemed literally true, as though her features actually shone with a radiance coming from within. The weight of those years fell from her as she ran across the sidewalk as lightly as a girl could run.

"Jimmy!" she called. "Oh, Jimmy!"

That was all. In moments of real stress, I've noticed, people rarely behave as one might expect them to; they haven't time to consider dramatic values. As for Jimmy—he said nothing at all. I couldn't see his face, standing above him, as I was. He had bowed it. And then, screwing his knuckles into his eyes as a small boy might do, he began to sob as though his heart would break.

It was just his shattered nerves, of course, but I doubt if Lady Luck either knew or cared what it was. He was Jimmy, and that was enough. So she put her arms around those shaking shoulders of his, to comfort him then and there before leading him to the taxi, following him within and closing its door behind them both.

IT WASN'T a sight that another man ought to see. It made me feel as though I'd been reading letters that were addressed to somebody else; but there was no use in my turning away. Nobody happened to be passing just then, but the taxi-driver was there. I wanted to punch his head, and I fancy that he must have felt the same about me, for he looked at me with a snarl as he whirled off with a shriek of protesting gears.

As for me, I went back to Letty. She was asleep, and I sat down to watch until morning. Then I found that she wasn't breathing any more. So I fastened the door as well as I could and came out here to try and think things out, as I said in the first place.

I haven't succeeded very well. But that's what happened, and if anyone fancies that happened wholly by chance, let him take a pencil and paper and try to figure out the odds against it and see how quickly he'll get into too many thousands of millions to count.

Some fellows hold that there's no such thing as chance. They're right. You can call it providence, or luck, or cosmic law or whatever you choose—but they're right; it isn't chance.

Well, that's about all I know, except that there'll be a shake-up in this precinct, and the police captain will be sent to "the goats" in Brooklyn or somewhere. For raiding Butch's place as he did? Rather not! How would that look, if the papers got hold of it? For letting the joint run as long as it did is what he'll be punished for. What do you think a city administration is, anyway?

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